GROWTH

BOOTH TARKINGTON

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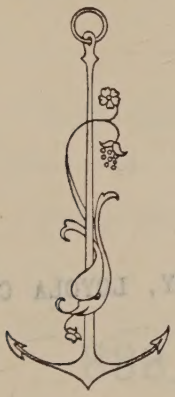
HARLEQUIN AND COLUMBINE
HIS OWN PEOPLE
IN THE ARENA
LOOKING FORWARD AND OTHERS
MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE
PENROD
PENROD AND SAM
RAMSEY MILHOLLAND
SEVENTEEN
THE BEAUTIFUL LADY
THE FASCINATING STRANGER AND OTHER STORIES
THE FLIRT
THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA
THE GUEST OF QUESNAY
THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS
THE MAN FROM HOME
THE MIDLANDER
THE PLUTOCRAT
THE TURMOIL
THE TWO VANREVELS
WOMEN

GROWTH

BY

BOOTH TARKINGTON



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FIRST EDITION

CONTENTS

PAGE

THE GOD 1

PART ONE

THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS 7

PART TWO

THE TURMOIL 319

PART THREE

NATIONAL AVENUE 591

GROWTH

GROWTH

THE GOD

THERE is a midland city in the heart of fair, open country, a dirty and wonderful city nesting dingily in the fog of its own smoke. The stranger must feel the dirt before he feels the wonder, for the dirt will be upon him instantly. It will be upon him and within him, since he must breathe it, and he may care for no further proof that wealth is here better loved than cleanliness; but whether he cares or not, the negligently tended streets incessantly press home the point, and so do the flecked and grimy citizens. At a breeze he must smother in whirlpools of dust, and if he should decline at any time to inhale the smoke he has the meagre alternative of suicide.

The smoke is like the bad breath of a giant panting for more and more riches. He gets them and pants the fiercer, smelling and swelling prodigiously. He has a voice, a hoarse voice, hot and rapacious, trained to one tune: "Wealth! I will get Wealth! I will make Wealth! I will sell Wealth for more Wealth! My house shall be dirty, my garment shall be dirty, and I will foul my neighbour so that he cannot be clean —but I will get Wealth! There shall be no clean thing about me: my wife shall be dirty and my child shall be dirty, but I will get Wealth!" And yet it is not wealth that he is so greedy for: what the giant really wants is hasty riches. To get these he squanders wealth upon the four winds, for wealth is in the smoke.

Not much longer ago than a generation, there was no

panting giant here, no heaving, grimy city; there was but a pleasant big town of neighbourly people who had understanding of one another, being, on the whole, much of the same type. It was a leisurely and kindly place—"homelike," it was called—and when the visitor had been taken through the State Asylum for the Insane and made to appreciate the view of the cemetery from a little hill, his host's duty as Baedeker was done. The good burghers were given to jogging comfortably about in phaetons or in surreys for a family drive on Sunday. No one was very rich; few were very poor; the air was clean, and there was time to live.

But there was a spirit abroad in the land, and it was strong here as elsewhere—a spirit that had moved in the depths of the American soil and laboured there, sweating, till it stirred the surface, rove the mountains, and emerged, tangible and monstrous, the god of all good American hearts —Bigness. And that god wrought the panting giant.

In the souls of the burghers there had always been the profound longing for size. Year by year the longing increased until it became an accumulated force: We must Grow! We must be Big! We must be Bigger! Bigness means Money! And the thing began to happen; their longing became a mighty Will. We must be Bigger! Bigger! Bigger! Get people here! Coax them here! Bribe them! Swindle them into coming, if you must, but get them! Shout them into coming! Deafen them into coming! Any kind of people; all kinds of people! We must be Bigger! Blow! Boost! Brag! Kill the faultfinder! Scream and bellow to the Most High: Bigness is patriotism and honour! Bigness is love and life and happiness! Bigness is Money! We want Bigness!

They got it. From all the states the people came; thinly at first, and slowly, but faster and faster in thicker and thicker swarms as the quick years went by. White people came, and black people and brown people and yellow people; the negroes came from the South by the thousands and thousands, multiplying by other thousands and thousands faster than they could die. From the four quarters of the earth the

people came, the broken and the unbroken, the tame and the wild—Germans, Irish, Italians, Hungarians, Scotch, Welsh, English, French, Swiss, Swedes, Norwegians, Armenians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Servians, Persians, Syrians, Japanese, Chinese, Turks, and every hybrid that these could propagate. And if there were no Eskimos nor Patagonians, what other human strain that earth might furnish failed to swim and bubble in this crucible?

With Bigness came the new machinery and the rush; the streets began to roar and rattle, the houses to tremble; the pavements were worn under the tread of hurrying multitudes. The old, leisurely, quizzical look of the faces was lost in something harder and warier; and a cockney type began to emerge discernibly—a cynical young mongrel, barbaric of feature, muscular and cunning; dressed in good fabrics fashioned apparently in imitation of the sketches drawn by newspaper comedians. The female of his kind came with him—a pale girl, shoddy and a little rouged; and they communicated in a nasal argot, mainly insolence and elisions. Nay, the common speech of the people showed change: in place of the old midland vernacular, irregular but clean, and not unwholesomely drawling, a jerky dialect of coined metaphors began to be heard, held together by *gunnas* and *gottas* and much fostered by the public journals.

The city piled itself high in the centre, tower on tower for a nucleus, and spread itself out over the plain, mile after mile; and in its vitals, like benevolent bacilli contending with malevolent in the body of a man, missions and refuges offered what assistance they might to the saloons and all the hells that cities house and shelter. Temptation and ruin were ready commodities on the market for purchase by the venturesome; highwaymen walked the streets at night and sometimes killed; snatching thieves were busy everywhere in the dusk; while housebreakers were a common apprehension and frequent reality. Life itself was somewhat safer from intentional destruction than it was in medieval Rome during a faction war—though the Roman murderer was more like

to pay for his deed—but death or mutilation beneath the wheels lay in ambush at every crossing.

The politicians let the people make all the laws they liked; it did not matter much, and the taxes went up, which is good for politicians. Law-making was a pastime of the people; nothing pleased them more. Singular fermentation of their humour, they even had laws forbidding dangerous speed. More marvellous still, they had a law forbidding smoke! They forbade chimneys to smoke and they forbade cigarettes to smoke. They made laws for all things and forgot them immediately; though sometimes they would remember after a while, and hurry to make new laws that the old laws should be enforced—and then forget both new and old. Wherever enforcement threatened Money or Votes—or wherever it was too much bother—it became a joke. Influence was the law.

So the place grew. And it grew strong.

Straightway when he came, each man fell to the same worship:

> Give me of thyself, O Bigness:
> Power to get more power!
> Riches to get more riches!
> Give me of thy sweat that I may sweat more!
> Give me Bigness to get more Bigness to myself,
> O Bigness, for Thine is the Power and the Glory!
> And there is no end but Bigness, ever and for ever!

PART ONE

THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS

CHAPTER I

MAJOR AMBERSON had "made a fortune" in 1873, when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Magnificence, like the size of a fortune, is always comparative, as even Magnificent Lorenzo may now perceive, if he has happened to haunt New York of late, and the Ambersons were magnificent in their day and place. Their splendour lasted throughout all the years that saw their Midland town spread and darken into a city, but reached its topmost during the period when every prosperous family with children kept a Newfoundland dog.

In that town, in those days, all the women who wore silk or velvet knew all the other women who wore silk or velvet, and when there was a new purchase of sealskin, sick people were got to windows to see it go by. Trotters were out, in the winter afternoons, racing light sleighs on National Avenue and Tennessee Street; everybody recognized both the trotters and the drivers; and again knew them as well on summer evenings, when slim buggies whizzed by in renewals of the snow-time rivalry. For that matter, everybody knew everybody else's family horse-and-carriage, could identify such a silhouette half a mile down the street, and thereby was sure who was going to market, or to a reception, or coming home from office or store to noon dinner or evening supper.

During the earlier years of this period, elegance of personal appearance was believed to rest more upon the texture of garments than upon their shaping. A silk dress needed no remodelling when it was a year or so old; it remained distinguished by merely remaining silk. Old men and senators and governors wore broadcloth; "full dress" was broadcloth with "doeskin" trousers; and there were seen men of all ages to whom a hat meant only that rigid, tall silk thing known to

impudence as a "stove-pipe." In town and country these men would wear no other hat, and, without self-consciousness, they went rowing in such hats.

Shifting fashions of shape replaced aristocracy of texture: dressmakers, shoemakers, hatmakers, and tailors, increasing in cunning and in power, found means to make new clothes old. The long contagion of the "Derby" hat arrived: one season the crown of this hat would be a bucket; the next it would be a spoon. Every house still kept its bootjack, but high-topped boots gave way to shoes and "congress gaiters"; and these were played through fashions that shaped them now with toes like box-ends and now with toes like the prows of racing shells.

Trousers with a crease were considered plebeian; the crease proved that the garment had lain upon a shelf, and hence was "ready-made"; these betraying trousers were called "hand-me-downs," in allusion to the shelf. In the early 'eighties, while bangs and bustles were having their own way with women, that variation of dandy known as the "dude" was invented: he wore trousers as tight as stockings, dagger-pointed shoes, a spoon "Derby," a single-breasted coat called a "Chesterfield," with short flaring skirts, a torturing cylindrical collar, laundered to a polish and three inches high, while his other neckgear might be a heavy, puffed cravat or a tiny bow fit for a doll's braids. With evening dress he wore a tan overcoat so short that his black coat-tails hung visible, five inches below the overcoat; but after a season or two he lengthened his overcoat till it touched his heels, and he passed out of his tight trousers into trousers like great bags. Then, presently, he was seen no more, though the word that had been coined for him remained in the vocabularies of the impertinent.

It was a hairier day than this. Beards were to the wearers' fancy, and things as strange as the Kaiserliche boar-tusk moustache were commonplace. "Side-burns" found nourishment upon childlike profiles; great Dundreary whiskers blew like tippets over young shoulders; moustaches were trained as

lambrequins over forgotten mouths; and it was possible for a Senator of the United States to wear a mist of white whisker upon his throat only, not a newspaper in the land finding the ornament distinguished enough to warrant a lampoon. Surely no more is needed to prove that so short a time ago we were living in another age!

. . . At the beginning of the Ambersons' great period most of the houses of the Midland town were of a pleasant architecture. They lacked style, but also lacked pretentiousness, and whatever does not pretend at all has style enough. They stood in commodious yards, well shaded by left-over forest trees, elm and walnut and beech, with here and there a line of tall sycamores where the land had been made by filling bayous from the creek. The house of a "prominent resident," facing Military Square, or National Avenue, or Tennessee Street, was built of brick upon a stone foundation, or of wood upon a brick foundation. Usually it had a "front porch" and a "back porch"; often a "side porch," too. There was a "front hall"; there was a "side hall"; and sometimes a "back hall." From the "front hall" opened three rooms, the "parlour," the "sitting-room," and the "library"; and the library could show warrant to its title—for some reason these people bought books. Commonly, the family sat more in the library than in the "sitting-room," while callers, when they came formally, were kept to the "parlour," a place of formidable polish and discomfort. The upholstery of the library furniture was a little shabby; but the hostile chairs and sofa of the "parlour" always looked new. For all the wear and tear they got they should have lasted a thousand years.

Upstairs were the bedrooms; "mother-and-father's room" the largest; a smaller room for one or two sons, another for one or two daughters; each of these rooms containing a double bed, a "washstand," a "bureau," a wardrobe, a little table, a rocking-chair, and often a chair or two that had been slightly damaged downstairs, but not enough to justify either the expense of repair or decisive abandonment in the attic.

And there was always a "spare-room," for visitors (where the sewing-machine usually was kept), and during the 'seventies there developed an appreciation of the necessity for a bathroom. Therefore the architects placed bathrooms in the new houses, and the older houses tore out a cupboard or two, set up a boiler beside the kitchen stove, and sought a new godliness, each with its own bathroom. The great American plumber joke, that many-branched evergreen, was planted at this time.

At the rear of the house, upstairs, was a bleak little chamber, called "the girl's room," and in the stable there was another bedroom, adjoining the hayloft, and called "the hired-man's room." House and stable cost seven or eight thousand dollars to build, and people with that much money to invest in such comforts were classified as the Rich. They paid the inhabitant of "the girl's room" two dollars a week, and, in the latter part of this period, two dollars and a half, and finally three dollars a week. She was Irish, ordinarily, or German, or it might be Scandinavian, but never native to the land unless she happened to be a person of colour. The man or youth who lived in the stable had like wages, and sometimes he, too, was lately a steerage voyager, but much oftener he was coloured.

After sunrise, on pleasant mornings, the alleys behind the stables were gay; laughter and shouting went up and down their dusty lengths, with a lively accompaniment of curry-combs knocking against back fences and stable walls, for the darkies loved to curry their horses in the alley. Darkies always prefer to gossip in shouts instead of whispers; and they feel that profanity, unless it be vociferous, is almost worthless. Horrible phrases were caught by early rising children and carried to older people for definition, sometimes at inopportune moments; while less investigative children would often merely repeat the phrases in some subsequent flurry of agitation, and yet bring about consequences so emphatic, as to be recalled with ease in middle life.

. . . They have passed, those darky hired-men of the Midland town; and the introspective horses they curried and brushed and whacked and amiably cursed—those good old horses switch their tails at flies no more. For all their seeming permanence they might as well have been buffaloes —or the buffalo laprobes that grew bald in patches and used to slide from the careless drivers' knees and hang unconcerned, halfway to the ground. The stables have been transformed into other likenesses, or swept away, like the woodsheds where were kept the stove-wood and kindling that the "girl" and the "hired-man" always quarreled over: who should fetch it. Horse and stable and woodshed, and the whole tribe of the "hired-man," all are gone. They went quickly, yet so silently that we whom they served have not yet really noticed that they are vanished.

So with other vanishings. There were the little bunty street-cars on the long, single track that went its troubled way among the cobblestones. At the rear door of the car there was no platform, but a step where passengers clung in wet clumps when the weather was bad and the car crowded. The patrons—if not too absent-minded—put their fares into a slot; and no conductor paced the heaving floor, but the driver would rap remindingly with his elbow upon the glass of the door to his little open platform if the nickels and the passengers did not appear to coincide in number. A lone mule drew the car, and sometimes drew it off the track, when the passengers would get out and push it on again. They really owed it courtesies like this, for the car was genially accommodating: a lady could whistle to it from an upstairs window, and the car would halt at once and wait for her while she shut the window, put on her hat and cloak, went downstairs, found an umbrella, told the "girl" what to have for dinner, and came forth from the house.

The previous passengers made little objection to such gallantry on the part of the car: they were wont to expect as much for themselves on like occasion. In good weather the

mule pulled the car a mile in a little less than twenty minutes, unless the stops were too long; but when the trolley-car came, doing its mile in five minutes and better, it would wait for nobody. Nor could its passengers have endured such a thing, because the faster they were carried the less time they had to spare! In the days before deathly contrivances hustled them through their lives, and when they had no telephones—another ancient vacancy profoundly responsible for leisure—they had time for everything: time to think, to talk, time to read, time to wait for a lady!

They even had time to dance "square dances," quadrilles, and "lancers"; they also danced the "racquette," and schottisches and polkas, and such whims as the "Portland Fancy." They pushed back the sliding doors between the "parlour" and the "sitting room," tacked down crash over the carpets, hired a few palms in green tubs, stationed three or four Italian musicians under the stairway in the "front hall"—and had great nights!

But these people were gayest on New Year's Day; they made it a true festival—something no longer known. The women gathered to "assist" the hostesses who kept "Open House"; and the carefree men, dandified and perfumed, went about in sleighs, or in carriages and ponderous "hacks," going from Open House to Open House, leaving fantastic cards in fancy baskets as they entered each doorway, and emerging a little later, more carefree than ever, if the punch had been to their liking. It always was, and, as the afternoon wore on, pedestrians saw great gesturing and waving of skin-tight lemon gloves, while ruinous fragments of song were dropped behind as the carriages rolled up and down the streets.

"Keeping Open House" was a merry custom; it has gone, like the all-day picnic in the woods, and like that prettiest of all vanished customs, the serenade. When a lively girl visited the town she did not long go unserenaded, though a visitor was not indeed needed to excuse a serenade. Of a summer night, young men would bring an orchestra under

a pretty girl's window—or, it might be, her father's, or that of an ailing maiden aunt—and flute, harp, fiddle, 'cello, cornet, and bass viol would presently release to the dulcet stars such melodies as sing through "You'll Remember Me," "I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "Kathleen Mavourneen," or "The Soldier's Farewell."

They had other music to offer, too, for these were the happy days of "Olivette" and "The Mascotte" and "The Chimes of Normandy" and "Giroflé-Girofla" and "Fra Diavola." Better than that, these were the days of "Pinafore" and "The Pirates of Penzance" and of "Patience." This last was needed in the Midland town, as elsewhere, for the "æsthetic movement" had reached thus far from London, and terrible things were being done to honest old furniture. Maidens sawed what-nots in two, and gilded the remains. They took the rockers from rocking-chairs and gilded the inadequate legs; they gilded the easels that supported the crayon portraits of their deceased uncles. In the new spirit of art they sold old clocks for new, and threw wax flowers and wax fruit, and the protecting glass domes, out upon the trash-heap. They filled vases with peacock feathers, or cat-tails, or sumach, or sunflowers, and set the vases upon mantelpieces and marble-topped tables. They embroidered daisies (which they called "marguerites") and sunflowers and sumach and cat-tails and owls and peacock feathers upon plush screens and upon heavy cushions, then strewed these cushions upon floors where fathers fell over them in the dark. In the teeth of sinful oratory, the daughters went on embroidering: they embroidered daisies and sunflowers and sumach and cat-tails and owls and peacock feathers upon "throws" which they had the courage to drape upon horsehair sofas; they painted owls and daisies and sunflowers and sumach and cat-tails and peacock feathers upon tambourines. They hung Chinese umbrellas of paper to the chandeliers; they nailed paper fans to the walls. They "studied" painting on china, these girls; they sang Tosti's new songs; they some-

times still practised the old, genteel habit of lady-fainting, and were most charming of all when they drove forth, three or four in a basket phaeton, on a spring morning.

Croquet and the mildest archery ever known were the sports of people still young and active enough for so much exertion; middle-age played euchre. There was a theatre, next door to the Amberson Hotel, and when Edwin Booth came for a night, everybody who could afford to buy a ticket was there, and all the "hacks" in town were hired. "The Black Crook" also filled the theatre, but the audience then was almost entirely of men who looked uneasy as they left for home when the final curtain fell upon the shocking girls dressed as fairies. But the theatre did not often do so well; the people of the town were still too thrifty.

They were thrifty because they were the sons or grandsons of the "early settlers," who had opened the wilderness and had reached it from the East and the South with wagons and axes and guns, but with no money at all. The pioneers were thrifty or they would have perished; they had to store away food for the winter, or goods to trade for food, and they often feared they had not stored enough—they left traces of that fear in their sons and grandsons. In the minds of most of these, indeed, their thrift was next to their religion: to save, even for the sake of saving, was their earliest lesson and discipline. No matter how prosperous they were, they could not spend money either upon "art," or upon mere luxury and entertainment, without a sense of sin.

Against so homespun a background the magnificence of the Ambersons was as conspicuous as a brass band at a funeral. Major Amberson bought two hundred acres of land at the end of National Avenue; and through this tract he built broad streets and cross-streets; paved them with cedar block, and curbed them with stone. He set up fountains, here and there, where the streets intersected, and at symmetrical intervals placed cast-iron statues, painted white, with their titles clear upon the pedestals: Minerva, Mercury, Hercules, Venus, Gladiator, Emperor Augustus, Fisher Boy, Stag-

hound, Mastiff, Greyhound, Fawn, Antelope, Wounded Doe, and Wounded Lion. Most of the forest trees had been left to flourish still, and, at some distance, or by moonlight, the place was in truth beautiful; but the ardent citizen, loving to see his city grow, wanted neither distance nor moonlight. He had not seen Versailles, but, standing before the Fountain of Neptune in Amberson Addition, at bright noon, and quoting the favourite comparison of the local newspapers, he declared Versailles outdone. All this Art showed a profit from the start, for the lots sold well and there was something like a rush to build in the new Addition. Its main thoroughfare, an oblique continuation of National Avenue, was called Amberson Boulevard, and here, at the juncture of the new Boulevard and the Avenue, Major Amberson reserved four acres for himself, and built his new house—the Amberson Mansion, of course.

This house was the pride of the town. Faced with stone as far back as the dining-room windows, it was a house of arches and turrets and girdling stone porches; it had the first porte-cochère seen in that town. There was a central "front hall" with a great black walnut stairway, and open to a green glass skylight called the "dome," three stories above the ground floor. A ballroom occupied most of the third story; and at one end of it was a carved walnut gallery for the musicians. Citizens told strangers that the cost of all this black walnut and wood-carving was sixty thousand dollars. "Sixty thousand dollars for the wood-work *alone!* Yes, sir, and hardwood floors all over the house! Turkish rugs and no carpets at all, except a Brussels carpet in the front parlour —I hear they call it the 'reception-room.' Hot and cold water upstairs and down, and stationary washstands in every last bedroom in the place! Their sideboard's built right into the house and goes all the way across one end of the dining room. It isn't walnut, it's solid mahogany! Not veneering—solid mahogany! Well, sir, I presume the President of the United States would be tickled to swap the White House for the new Amberson Mansion, if the Major'd give him the

chance—but by the Almighty Dollar, you bet your sweet life the Major wouldn't!"

The visitor to the town was certain to receive further enlightenment, for there was one form of entertainment never omitted: he was always patriotically taken for "a little drive around our city," even if his host had to hire a hack, and the climax of the display was the Amberson Mansion. "Look at that greenhouse they've put up there in the side yard," the escort would continue. "And look at that brick stable! Most folks would think that stable plenty big enough and good enough to live in; it's got running water and four rooms upstairs for two hired men and one of 'em's family to live in. They keep one hired man loafin' in the house, and they got a married hired man out in the stable, and his wife does the washing. They got box-stalls for four horses, and they keep a coupay, and some new kinds of fancy rigs you never saw the beat of! 'Carts' they call two of 'em—'way up in the air they are—too high for me! I guess they got every new kind of fancy rig in there that's been invented. And harness—well, everybody in town can tell when Ambersons are out driving after dark, by the jingle. This town never did see so much style as Ambersons are putting on, these days; and I guess it's going to be expensive, because a lot of other folks'll try to keep up with 'em. The Major's wife and the daughter's been to Europe, and my wife tells me since they got back they make tea there every afternoon about five o'clock, and drink it. Seems to me it would go against a person's stomach, just before supper like that, and anyway tea isn't fit for much—not unless you're sick or something. My wife says Ambersons don't make lettuce salad the way other people do; they don't chop it up with sugar and vinegar at all. They pour olive oil on it with their vinegar, and they have it separate—not along with the rest of the meal. And they *eat* these olives, too: green things they are, something like a hard plum, but a friend of mine told me they tasted a good deal like a bad hickory-nut. My wife says she's going to buy some; you got to eat nine and then you get to like 'em, she

says. Well, I wouldn't eat nine bad hickory-nuts to get to like *them*, and I'm going to let these olives alone. Kind of a woman's dish, anyway, I suspect, but most everybody'll be makin' a stagger to worm through nine of 'em, now Ambersons brought 'em to town. Yes, sir, the rest'll eat 'em, whether they get sick or not! Looks to me like some people in this city'd be willing to go crazy if they thought that would help 'em to be as high-toned as Ambersons. Old Aleck Minafer—he's about the closest old codger we got—he come in my office the other day, and he pretty near had a stroke tellin' me about his daughter Fanny. Seems Miss Isabel Amberson's got some kind of a dog—they call it a Saint Bernard—and Fanny was bound to have one, too. Well, old Aleck told her he didn't like dogs except rat-terriers, because a rat-terrier cleans up the mice, but she kept on at him, and finally he said all right she could have one. Then, by George! she says Ambersons *bought* their dog, and you can't get one without paying for it: they cost from fifty to a hundred dollars up! Old Aleck wanted to know if I ever heard of anybody buyin' a dog before, because, of course, even a Newfoundland or a setter, you can usually get somebody to give you one. He says he saw some sense in payin'a nigger a dime, or even a quarter, to *drown* a dog for you, but to pay out fifty dollars and maybe more—well, sir, he like to choked himself to death, right there in my office! Of course everybody realizes that Major Amberson is a fine business man, but what with throwin' money around for dogs, and every which and what, some think all this style's bound to break him up, if his family don't quit!"

One citizen, having thus discoursed to a visitor, came to a thoughtful pause, and then added, "Does seem pretty much like squandering, yet when you see that dog out walking with this Miss Isabel, he seems worth the money."

"What's she look like?"

"Well, sir," said the citizen, "she's not more than just about eighteen or maybe nineteen years old, and I don't know as I know just how to put it—but she's kind of a *delightful* lookin' young lady!"

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER citizen said an eloquent thing about Miss Isabel Amberson's looks. This was Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster, the foremost literary authority and intellectual leader of the community—for both the daily newspapers thus described Mrs. Foster when she founded the Women's Tennyson Club; and her word upon art, letters, and the drama was accepted more as law than as opinion. Naturally, when "Hazel Kirke" finally reached the town, after its long triumph in larger places, many people waited to hear what Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster thought of it before they felt warranted in expressing any estimate of the play. In fact, some of them waited in the lobby of the theatre, as they came out, and formed an inquiring group about her.

"I didn't see the play," she informed them.

"What! Why, we saw you, right in the middle of the fourth row!"

"Yes," she said, smiling, "but I was sitting just behind Isabel Amberson. I couldn't look at anything except her wavy brown hair and the wonderful back of her neck."

The ineligible young men of the town (they were all ineligible) were unable to content themselves with the view that had so charmed Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster: they spent their time struggling to keep Miss Amberson's face turned toward them. She turned it most often, observers said, toward two: one excelling in the general struggle by his sparkle, and the other by that winning if not winsome old trait, persistence. The sparkling gentleman "led germans" with her, and sent sonnets to her with his bouquets—sonnets lacking neither music nor wit. He was generous, poor, well-dressed, and his amazing persuasiveness was one reason why he was always in debt. No one doubted that he would be able to persuade Isabel, but he unfortunately joined too

merry a party one night, and, during a moonlight serenade upon the lawn before the Amberson Mansion, was easily identified from the windows as the person who stepped through the bass viol and had to be assisted to a waiting carriage. One of Miss Amberson's brothers was among the serenaders, and, when the party had dispersed, remained propped against the front door in a state of helpless liveliness; the Major going down in a dressing-gown and slippers to bring him in, and scolding mildly, while imperfectly concealing strong impulses to laughter. Miss Amberson also laughed at this brother, the next day, but for the suitor it was a different matter: she refused to see him when he called to apologize. "You seem to care a great deal about bass viols!" he wrote her. "I promise never to break another." She made no response to the note, unless it was an answer, two weeks later, when her engagement was announced. She took the persistent one, Wilbur Minafer, no breaker of bass viols or of hearts, no serenader at all.

A few people, who always foresaw everything, claimed that they were not surprised, because though Wilbur Minafer "might not be an Apollo, as it were," he was "a steady young business man, and a good church-goer," and Isabel Amberson was "pretty sensible—for such a showy girl." But the engagement astounded the young people, and most of their fathers and mothers, too; and as a topic it supplanted literature at the next meeting of the "Women's Tennyson Club."

"Wilbur *Minafer!*" a member cried, her inflection seeming to imply that Wilbur's crime was explained by his surname. "Wilbur *Minafer!* It's the queerest thing I ever heard! To think of her taking Wilbur Minafer, just because a man *any* woman would like a thousand times better was a little wild one night at a serenade!"

"No," said Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster. "It isn't that. It isn't even because she's afraid he'd be a dissipated husband and she wants to be safe. It isn't because she's religious or hates wildness; it isn't even because she hates wildness in *him.*"

"Well, but look how she's thrown him over for it."

"No, that wasn't her reason," said the wise Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster. "If men only knew it—and it's a good thing they don't—a woman doesn't really care much about whether a man's wild or not, if it doesn't affect herself, and Isabel Amberson doesn't care a thing!"

"Mrs. *Foster!*"

"No, she doesn't. What she minds is his making a clown of himself in her front yard! It made her think he didn't care much about *her*. She's probably mistaken, but that's what she thinks, and it's too late for her to think anything else now, because she's going to be married right away—the invitations will be out next week. It'll be a big Amberson-style thing, raw oysters floating in scooped-out blocks of ice and a band from out-of-town—champagne, showy presents; a colossal present from the Major. Then Wilbur will take Isabel on the carefulest little wedding trip he can manage, and she'll be a good wife to him, but they'll have the worst spoiled lot of children this town will ever see."

"How on earth do you make *that* out, Mrs. Foster?"

"She couldn't love Wilbur, could she?" Mrs. Foster demanded, with no challengers. "Well, it will all go to her children, and she'll ruin 'em!"

The prophetess proved to be mistaken in a single detail merely: except for that, her foresight was accurate. The wedding was of Ambersonian magnificence, even to the floating oysters; and the Major's colossal present was a set of architect's designs for a house almost as elaborate and impressive as the Mansion, the house to be built in Amberson Addition by the Major. The orchestra was certainly not that local one which had suffered the loss of a bass viol; the musicians came, according to the prophecy and next morning's paper, from afar; and at midnight the bride was still being toasted in champagne, though she had departed upon her wedding journey at ten. Four days later the pair had returned to town, which promptness seemed fairly to demonstrate that Wilbur had indeed taken Isabel upon the carefulest little

trip he could manage. According to every report, she was from the start "a good wife to him," but here in a final detail the prophecy proved inaccurate. Wilbur and Isabel did not have children; they had only one.

"Only one," Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster admitted. "But I'd like to know if he isn't spoiled enough for a whole carload!"

Again she found none to challenge her.

At the age of nine, George Amberson Minafer, the Major's one grandchild, was a princely terror, dreaded not only in Amberson Addition but in many other quarters through which he galloped on his white pony. "By golly, I guess you think you own this town!" an embittered labourer complained, one day, as Georgie rode the pony straight through a pile of sand the man was sieving. "I will when I grow up," the undisturbed child replied. "I guess my grandpa owns it now, you bet!" And the baffled workman, having no means to controvert what seemed a mere exaggeration of the facts, could only mutter "Oh, pull down your vest!"

"Don't haf to! Doctor says it ain't healthy!" the boy returned promptly. "But I tell you what I'll do: I'll pull down my vest if you'll wipe off your chin!"

This was stock and stencil: the accustomed argot of street badinage of the period; and in such matters Georgie was an expert. He had no vest to pull down; the incongruous fact was that a fringed sash girdled the juncture of his velvet blouse and breeches, for the Fauntleroy period had set in, and Georgie's mother had so poor an eye for appropriate things, where Georgie was concerned, that she dressed him according to the doctrine of that school in boy decoration. Not only did he wear a silk sash, and silk stockings, and a broad lace collar, with his little black velvet suit: he had long brown curls, and often came home with burrs in them.

Except upon the surface (which was not his own work, but his mother's) Georgie bore no vivid resemblance to the fabulous little Cedric. The storied boy's famous "Lean on *me*, grandfather," would have been difficult to imagine upon

the lips of Georgie. A month after his ninth birthday anniversary, when the Major gave him his pony, he had already become acquainted with the toughest boys in various distant parts of the town, and had convinced them that the toughness of a rich little boy with long curls might be considered in many respects superior to their own. He fought them, learning how to go baresark at a certain point in a fight, bursting into tears of anger, reaching for rocks, uttering wailed threats of murder and attempting to fulfil them. Fights often led to intimacies, and he acquired the art of saying things more exciting than "Don't haf to!" and "Doctor says it ain't healthy!" Thus, on a summer afternoon, a strange boy, sitting bored upon the gate-post of the Reverend Malloch Smith, beheld George Amberson Minafer rapidly approaching on his white pony, and was impelled by bitterness to shout: "Shoot the ole jackass! Look at the girly curls! Say, bub, where'd you steal your mother's ole sash!"

"Your sister stole it for me!" Georgie instantly replied, checking the pony. "She stole it off our clo'es-line an' gave it to me."

"You go get your hair cut!" said the stranger hotly. "Yah! I haven't got any sister!"

"I know you haven't at home," Georgie responded. "I mean the one that's in jail."

"I dare you to get down off that pony!"

Georgie jumped to the ground, and the other boy descended from the Reverend Mr. Smith's gatepost—but he descended inside the gate. "I dare you outside that gate," said Georgie.

"Yah! I dare you halfway here. I dare you——"

But these were luckless challenges, for Georgie immediately vaulted the fence—and four minutes later Mrs. Malloch Smith, hearing strange noises, looked forth from a window; then screamed, and dashed for the pastor's study. Mr. Malloch Smith, that grim-bearded Methodist, came to the front yard and found his visiting nephew being rapidly

prepared by Master Minafer to serve as a principal figure in a pageant of massacre. It was with great physical difficulty that Mr. Smith managed to give his nephew a chance to escape into the house, for Georgie was hard and quick, and, in such matters, remarkably intense; but the minister, after a grotesque tussle, got him separated from his opponent, and shook him.

"You stop that, you!" Georgie cried fiercely; and wrenched himself away. "I guess you don't know who I am!"

"Yes, I do know!" the angered Mr. Smith retorted. "I know who you are, and you're a disgrace to your mother! Your mother ought to be ashamed of herself to allow——"

"Shut up about my mother bein' ashamed of herself!"

Mr. Smith, exasperated, was unable to close the dialogue with dignity. "She ought to be ashamed," he repeated. "A woman that lets a bad boy like you——"

But Georgie had reached his pony and mounted. Before setting off at his accustomed gallop, he paused to interrupt the Reverend Malloch Smith again. "You pull down your vest, you old Billygoat, you!" he shouted, distinctly. "Pull down your vest, wipe off your chin—an' go to hell!"

Such precocity is less unusual, even in children of the Rich, than most grown people imagine. However, it was a new experience for the Reverend Malloch Smith, and left him in a state of excitement. He at once wrote a note to Georgie's mother, describing the crime according to his nephew's testimony; and the note reached Mrs. Minafer before Georgie did. When he got home she read it to him sorrowfully.

Dear Madam:

Your son has caused a painful distress in my household. He made an unprovoked attack upon a little nephew of mine who is visiting in my household, insulted him by calling him vicious names and falsehoods, stating that ladies of his family were in jail. He then tried to make his pony kick him, and when the child, who is only eleven years old, while your son is much older and stronger, endeavoured to avoid his indignities and withdraw quietly, he pursued him into the enclosure of my property and brutally assaulted him.

When I appeared upon this scene he deliberately called insultin words to me, concluding with profanity, such as "go to hell," whic was heard not only by myself but by my wife and the lady wh lives next door. I trust such a state of undisciplined behaviour ma be remedied for the sake of the reputation for propriety, if nothin higher, of the family to which this unruly child belongs.

Georgie had muttered various interruptions, and as sh concluded the reading he said:

"He's an ole liar!"

"Georgie, you mustn't say 'liar.' Isn't this letter th truth?"

"Well," said Georgie, "how old am I?"

"Ten."

"Well, look how he says I'm older than a boy eleven year old."

"That's true," said Isabel. "He does. But isn't some of i true, Georgie?"

Georgie felt himself to be in a difficulty here, and he wa silent.

"Georgie, did you say what he says you did?"

"Which one?"

"Did you tell him to—to—— Did you say, 'Go to hell'?"

Georgie looked worried for a moment longer; then h brightened. "Listen here, mamma; grandpa wouldn't wip his shoe on that ole story-teller, would he?"

"Georgie, you mustn't——"

"I mean: none of the Ambersons wouldn't have anything to do with him, would they? He doesn't even know *you* does he, mamma?"

"That hasn't anything to do with it."

"Yes, it has! I mean: none of the Amberson family go t see him, and they never have him come in their house; they wouldn't ask him to, and they prob'ly wouldn't even let him."

"That isn't what we're talking about."

"I bet," said Georgie emphatically, "I bet if he wanted to see any of 'em, he'd haf to go around to the side door!"

"No, dear, they——"

"Yes, they would, mamma! So what does it matter if I did say somep'm' to him he didn't like? That kind o' people, I don't see why you can't say anything you want to, to 'em!"

"No, Georgie. And you haven't answered me whether you said that dreadful thing he says you did."

"Well——" said Georgie. "Anyway, he said somep'm' to me that made me mad." And upon this point he offered no further details; he would not explain to his mother that what had made him "mad" was Mr. Smith's hasty condemnation of herself: "Your mother ought to be ashamed," and, "A woman that lets a bad boy like you——" Georgie did not even consider excusing himself by quoting these insolences.

Isabel stroked his head. "They were terrible words for you to use, dear. From his letter he doesn't seem a very tactful person, but——"

"He's just riffraff," said Georgie.

"You mustn't say so," his mother gently agreed. "Where did you learn those bad words he speaks of? Where did you hear any one use them?"

"Well, I've heard 'em serreval places. I guess Uncle George Amberson was the *first* I ever heard say 'em. Uncle George Amberson said 'em to papa once. Papa didn't like it, but Uncle George was just laughin' at papa, an' then he said 'em while he was laughin'."

"That was wrong of him," she said, but almost instinctively he detected the lack of conviction in her tone. It was Isabel's great failing that whatever an Amberson did seemed right to her, especially if the Amberson was either her brother George, or her son George. She knew that she should be more severe with the latter now, but severity with him was beyond her power; and the Reverend Malloch Smith had succeeded only in rousing her resentment against himself. Georgie's symmetrical face—altogether an Amberson face—had looked never more beautiful to her. It always looked unusually beautiful when she tried to be severe with him. "You

must promise me," she said feebly, "never to use those bad words again."

"I promise not to," he said promptly—and he whispered an immediate codicil under his breath: "Unless I get mad at somebody!" This satisfied a code according to which, in his own sincere belief, he never told lies.

"That's a good boy," she said, and he ran out to the yard, his punishment over. Some admiring friends were gathered there; they had heard of his adventure, knew of the note, and were waiting to see what was going to "happen" to him. They hoped for an account of things, and also that he would allow them to "take turns" riding his pony to the end of the alley and back.

They were really his henchmen: Georgie was a lord among boys. In fact, he was a personage among certain sorts of grown people, and was often fawned upon; the alley negroes delighted in him, chuckled over him, flattered him slavishly. For that matter, he often heard well-dressed people speaking of him admiringly: a group of ladies once gathered about him on the pavement where he was spinning a top. "I *know* this is Georgie!" one exclaimed, and turned to the others with the impressiveness of a showman. "Major Amberson's only grandchild!" The others said, "It *is?*" and made clicking sounds with their mouths; two of them loudly whispering, "*So* handsome!"

Georgie, annoyed because they kept standing upon the circle he had chalked for his top, looked at them coldly and offered a suggestion:

"Oh, go hire a hall!"

As an Amberson, he was already a public character, and the story of his adventure in the Reverend Malloch Smith's front yard became a town topic. Many people glanced at him, with great distaste, thereafter, when they chanced to encounter him, which meant nothing to Georgie, because he innocently believed most grown people to be necessarily cross-looking as a normal phenomenon resulting from the adult state; and he failed to comprehend that the distasteful

glances had any personal bearing upon himself. If he had perceived such a bearing, he would have been affected only so far, probably, as to mutter, "Riffraff!" Possibly he would have shouted it; and, certainly, most people believed a story that went round the town just after Mrs. Amberson's funeral, when Georgie was eleven. Georgie was reported to have differed with the undertaker about the seating of the family; his indignant voice had become audible: "Well, who *is* the most important person at my own grandmother's funeral?" And later he had projected his head from the window of the foremost mourners' carriage, as the undertaker happened to pass.

"*Riffraff!*"

There were people—grown people they were—who expressed themselves longingly: they *did* hope to live to see the day, they said, when that boy would get his comeupance! (They used that honest word, so much better than "deserts," and not until many years later to be more clumsily rendered as "what is coming to him.") *Something* was bound to take him down, some day, and they only wanted to *be* there! But Georgie heard nothing of this, and the yearners for his taking down went unsatisfied, while their yearning grew the greater as the happy day of fulfilment was longer and longer postponed. His grandeur was not diminished by the Malloch Smith story; the rather it was increased, and among other children (especially among little girls) there was added to the prestige of his gilded position that diabolical glamour which must inevitably attend a boy who has told a minister to go to hell.

CHAPTER III

UNTIL he reached the age of twelve, Georgie's education was a domestic process; tutors came to the house; and those citizens who yearned for his taking down often said: "Just wait till he has to go to public school; *then* he'll get it!" But at twelve Georgie was sent to a private school in the town, and there came from this small and dependent institution no report, or even rumour, of Georgie's getting anything that he was thought to deserve; therefore the yearning still persisted, though growing gaunt with feeding upon itself. For, although Georgie's pomposities and impudence in the little school were often almost unbearable, the teachers were fascinated by him. They did not like him—he was too arrogant for that—but he kept them in such a state of emotion that they thought more about him than they did about all of the other ten pupils. The emotion he kept them in was usually one resulting from injured self-respect, but sometimes it was dazzled admiration. So far as their conscientious observation went, he "studied" his lessons sparingly; but sometimes, in class, he flashed an admirable answer, with a comprehension not often shown by the pupils they taught; and he passed his examinations easily. In all, without discernible effort, he acquired at this school some rudiments of a liberal education and learned nothing whatever about himself.

The yearners were still yearning when Georgie, at sixteen, was sent away to a great "Prep School." "Now," they said brightly, "he'll get it! He'll find himself among boys just as important in their home towns as he is, and they'll knock the stuffing out of him when he puts on his airs with them! Oh, but that *would* be worth something to see!" They were mistaken, it appeared, for when Georgie returned, a few

months later, he still seemed to have the same stuffing. He had been deported by the authorities, the offence being stated as "insolence and profanity"; in fact, he had given the principal of the school instructions almost identical with those formerly objected to by the Reverend Malloch Smith.

But he had not got his come-upance, and those who counted upon it were embittered by his appearance upon the down-town streets driving a dog-cart at a criminal speed, making pedestrians retreat from the crossings, and behaving generally as if he "owned the earth." A disgusted hardware dealer of middle age, one of those who hungered for Georgie's downfall, was thus driven back upon the sidewalk to avoid being run over, and so far forgot himself as to make use of the pet street insult of the year: "Got 'ny *sense!* See here, bub, does your mother know you're out?"

Georgie, without even seeming to look at him, flicked the long lash of his whip dexterously, and a little spurt of dust came from the hardware man's trousers, not far below the waist. He was not made of hardware: he raved, looking for a missile; then, finding none, commanded himself sufficiently to shout after the rapid dog-cart: "Turn down your pants, you would-be dude! Raining in dear ole Lunnon! Git off the earth!"

Georgie gave him no encouragement to think that he was heard. The dog-cart turned the next corner, causing indignation there, likewise, and, having proceeded some distance farther, halted in front of the "Amberson Block"—an old-fashioned four-story brick warren of lawyers' offices, insurance and real-estate offices, with a "drygoods store" occupying the ground floor. Georgie tied his lathered trotter to a telegraph pole, and stood for a moment looking at the building critically: it seemed shabby, and he thought his grandfather ought to replace it with a fourteen-story skyscraper, or even a higher one, such as he had lately seen in New York —when he stopped there for a few days of recreation and rest on his way home from the bereaved school. About the entryway to the stairs were various tin signs, announcing the oc-

cupation and location of upper-floor tenants, and Georgie decided to take some of these with him if he should ever go to college. However, he did not stop to collect them at this time, but climbed the worn stairs—there was no elevator—to the fourth floor, went down a dark corridor, and rapped three times upon a door. It was a mysterious door, its upper half, of opaque glass, bearing no sign to state the business or profession of the occupants within; but overhead, upon the lintel, four letters had been smearingly inscribed, partly with purple ink and partly with a soft lead pencil, "F. O. T. A." and upon the plaster wall, above the lintel, there was a drawing dear to male adolescence: a skull and crossbones.

Three raps, similar to Georgie's, sounded from within the room. Georgie then rapped four times; the rapper within the room rapped twice, and Georgie rapped seven times. This ended precautionary measures; and a well-dressed boy of sixteen opened the door; whereupon Georgie entered quickly and the door was closed behind him. Seven boys of congenial age were seated in a semicircular row of damaged office chairs, facing a platform whereon stood a solemn, red-haired young personage with a table before him. At one end of the room there was a battered sideboard, and upon it were some empty beer bottles, a tobacco can about two-thirds full, with a web of mould over the surface of the tobacco, a dusty cabinet photograph (not inscribed) of Miss Lillian Russell, several withered old pickles, a caseknife, and a half-petrified section of icing-cake on a sooty plate. At the other end of the room were two rickety card-tables and a stand of bookshelves where were displayed under dust four or five small volumes of M. Guy de Maupassant's stories, "Robinson Crusoe," "Sappho," "Mr. Barnes of New York," a work by Giovanni Boccaccio, a Bible, "The Arabian Nights' Entertainment," "Studies of the Human Form Divine," "The Little Minister," and a clutter of monthly magazines and illustrated weeklies of about that crispness one finds in such articles upon a doctor's ante-room table. Upon the wall, above the sideboard, was an old framed lithograph of Miss

Della Fox in "Wang"; over the bookshelves there was another lithograph purporting to represent Mr. John L. Sullivan in a boxing costume, and beside it a half-tone reproduction of "A Reading From Homer." The final decoration consisted of damaged papier-mâché—a round shield with two battle-axes and two cross-hilted swords, upon the wall over the little platform where stood the red-haired presiding officer. He addressed Georgie in a serious voice:

"Welcome, Friend of the Ace."

"Welcome, Friend of the Ace," Georgie responded, and all of the other boys repeated the words, "Welcome, Friend of the Ace."

"Take your seat in the secret semicircle," said the presiding officer. "We will now proceed to——"

But Georgie was disposed to be informal. He interrupted, turning to the boy who had admitted him: "Look here, Charlie Johnson, what's Fred Kinney doing in the president's chair? That's my place, isn't it? What you men been up to here, anyhow? Didn't you all agree I was to be president just the same, even if I was away at school?"

"Well——" said Charlie Johnson uneasily. "Listen! I didn't have much to do with it. Some of the other members thought that long as you weren't in town or anything, and Fred gave the sideboard, why——"

Mr. Kinney, presiding, held in his hand, in lieu of a gavel, and considered much more impressive, a Civil War relic known as a "horse-pistol." He rapped loudly for order. "All Friends of the Ace will take their seats!" he said sharply. "I'm president of the F. O. T. A. now, George Minafer, and don't you forget it! You and Charlie Johnson sit down, because I was elected perfectly fair, and we're goin' to hold a meeting here."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said George skeptically.

Charlie Johnson thought to mollify him. "Well, didn't we call this meeting just especially because you told us to? You said yourself we ought to have a kind of celebration because you've got back to town, George, and that's what we're

here for now, and everything. What do you care about being president? All it amounts to is just calling the roll and——"

The president *de facto* hammered the table. "This meeting will now proceed to——"

"No, it won't," said George, and he advanced to the desk, laughing contemptuously. "Get off that platform."

"This meeting will come to order!" Mr. Kinney commanded fiercely.

"You put down that gavel," said George. "Whose is it, I'd like to know? It belongs to my grandfather, and you quit hammering it that way or you'll break it, and I'll have to knock your head off."

"This meeting will come to order! I was legally elected here, and I'm not going to be bulldozed!"

"All right," said Georgie. "You're president. Now we'll hold another election."

"We will not!" Fred Kinney shouted. "We'll have our reg'lar meeting, and then we'll play euchre a nickel a corner, what we're here for. This meeting will now come to ord——"

Georgie addressed the members. "I'd like to know who got up this thing in the first place," he said. "Who's the founder of the F. O. T. A., if you please? Who got this room rent free? Who got the janitor to let us have most of this furniture? You suppose you could keep this clubroom a minute if I told my grandfather I didn't want it for a literary club any more? I'd like to say a word on how you members been acting, too! When I went away I said I didn't care if you had a *vice*-president or something while I was gone, but here I hardly turned my back and you had to go and elect Fred Kinney president! Well, if that's what you want, you can have it. I was going to have a little celebration down here some night pretty soon, and bring some port wine, like we drink at school in our crowd there, and I *was* going to get my grandfather to give the club an extra room across the hall, and prob'ly I could get my Uncle George to give us his old billiard table, because he's got a new one, and the club could put it in the other room. Well, you got a

new president now!" Here Georgie moved toward the door and his tone became plaintive, though undeniably there was disdain beneath his sorrow. "I guess all I better do is—resign!"

And he opened the door, apparently intending to withdraw.

"All in favour of having a new election," Charlie Johnson shouted hastily, "say, 'Aye'!"

"Aye" was said by everyone present except Mr. Kinney, who began a hot protest, but it was immediately smothered.

"All in favour of me being president instead of Fred Kinney," shouted Georgie, "say 'Aye.' The 'Ayes' have it!"

"I resign," said the red-headed boy, gulping as he descended from the platform. "I resign from the club!"

Hot-eyed, he found his hat and departed, jeers echoing after him as he plunged down the corridor. Georgie stepped upon the platform, and took up the emblem of office.

"Ole red-head Fred'll be around next week," said the new chairman. "He'll be around boot-lickin' to get us to take him back in again, but I guess we don't want him: that fellow always was a trouble-maker. We will now proceed with our meeting. Well, fellows, I suppose you want to hear from your president. I don't know that I have much to say, as I have already seen most of you a few times since I got back. I had a good time at the old school, back East, but had a little trouble with the faculty and came on home. My family stood by me as well as I could ask, and I expect to stay right here in the old town until whenever I decide to enter college. Now, I don't suppose there's any more business before the meeting. I guess we might as well play cards. Anybody that's game for a little quarter-limit poker or any limit they say, why I'd like to have 'em sit at the president's card-table."

When the diversions of the Friends of the Ace were concluded for that afternoon, Georgie invited his chief supporter, Mr. Charlie Johnson, to drive home with him to dinner, and as they jingled up National Avenue in the dog-cart, Charlie asked:

"What sort of men did you run up against at that school, George?"

"Best crowd there: finest set of men I ever met."

"How'd you get in with 'em?"

Georgie laughed. "I let them get in with *me*, Charlie," he said in a tone of gentle explanation. "It's vulgar to do any other way. Did I tell you the nickname they gave me —'King'? That was what they called me at that school, 'King Minafer.'"

"How'd they happen to do that?" his friend asked innocently.

"Oh, different things," George answered lightly. "Of course, any of 'em that came from anywhere out in this part the country knew about the family and all that, and so I suppose it was a good deal on account of—oh, on account of the family and the way I do things, most likely."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Mr. George Amberson Minafer came home for the holidays at Christmastide, in his sophomore year, probably no great change had taken place inside him, but his exterior was visibly altered. Nothing about him encouraged any hope that he had received his come-upance; on the contrary, the yearners for that stroke of justice must yearn even more itchingly: the gilded youth's manner had become polite, but his politeness was of a kind which democratic people found hard to bear. In a word, M. le Duc had returned from the gay life of the capital to show himself for a week among the loyal peasants belonging to the old château, and their quaint habits and costumes afforded him a mild amusement.

Cards were out for a ball in his honour, and this pageant of the tenantry was held in the ballroom of the Amberson Mansion the night after his arrival. It was, as Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster said of Isabel's wedding, "a big Amberson-style thing," though that wise Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster had long ago gone the way of all wisdom, having stepped out of the Midland town, unquestionably into heaven—a long step, but not beyond her powers. She had successors, but no successor; the town having grown too large to confess that it was intellectually led and literarily authoritated by one person; and some of these successors were not invited to the ball, for dimensions were now so metropolitan that intellectual leaders and literary authorities loomed in outlying regions unfamiliar to the Ambersons. However, all "old citizens" recognizable as gentry received cards, and of course so did their dancing descendants.

The orchestra and the caterer were brought from away, in the Amberson manner, though this was really a gesture —perhaps one more of habit than of ostentation—for ser-

vitors of gaiety as proficient as these importations were nowadays to be found in the town. Even flowers and plants and roped vines were brought from afar—not, however, until the stock of the local florists proved insufficient to obliterate the interior structure of the big house, in the Amberson way. It was the last of the great, long-remembered dances that "everybody talked about"—there were getting to be so many people in town that no later than the next year there were too many for "everybody" to hear of even such a ball as the Ambersons'.

George, white-gloved, with a gardenia in his buttonhole, stood with his mother and the Major, embowered in the big red and gold drawing-room downstairs, to "receive" the guests; and, standing thus together, the trio offered a picturesque example of good looks persistent through three generations. The Major, his daughter, and his grandson were of a type all Amberson: tall, straight, and regular, with dark eyes, short noses, good chins; and the grandfather's expression, no less than the grandson's, was one of faintly amused condescension. There was a difference, however. The grandson's unlined young face had nothing to offer except this condescension; the grandfather's had other things to say. It was a handsome, worldly old face, conscious of its importance, but persuasive rather than arrogant, and not without tokens of sufferings withstood. The Major's short white hair was parted in the middle, like his grandson's, and in all he stood as briskly equipped to the fashion as exquisite young George.

Isabel, standing between her father and her son, caused a vague amazement in the mind of the latter. Her age, just under forty, was for George a thought of something as remote as the moons of Jupiter: he could not possibly have conceived such an age ever coming to be his own: five years was the limit of his thinking in time. Five years ago he had been a child not yet fourteen; and those five years were an abyss. Five years hence he would be almost twenty-four; what the girls he knew called "one of the older men." He could imagine

himself at twenty-four, but beyond that, his powers staggered and refused the task. He saw little essential difference between thirty-eight and eighty-eight, and his mother was to him not a woman but wholly a mother. He had no perception of her other than as an adjunct to himself, his mother; nor could he imagine her thinking or doing anything —falling in love, walking with a friend, or reading a book— as a woman, and not as his mother. The woman, Isabel, was a stranger to her son; as completely a stranger as if he had never in his life seen her or heard her voice. And it was tonight, while he stood with her, "receiving," that he caught a disquieting glimpse of this stranger whom he thus fleetingly encountered for the first time.

Youth cannot imagine romance apart from youth. That is why the rôles of the heroes and heroines of plays are given by the managers to the most youthful actors they can find among the competent. Both middle-aged people and young people enjoy a play about young lovers; but only middle-aged people will tolerate a play about middle-aged lovers; young people will not come to see such a play, because, for them, middle-aged lovers are a joke—not a very funny one. Therefore, to bring both the middle-aged people and the young people into his house, the manager makes his romance as young as he can. Youth will indeed be served, and its profound instinct is to be not only scornfully amused but vaguely angered by middle-age romance. So, standing beside his mother, George was disturbed by a sudden impression, coming upon him out of nowhere, so far as he could detect, that her eyes were brilliant, that she was graceful and youthful—in a word, that she was romantically lovely.

He had one of those curious moments that seem to have neither a cause nor any connection with actual things. While it lasted, he was disquieted not by thoughts—for he had no definite thoughts—but by a slight emotion like that caused in a dream by the presence of something invisible, soundless, and yet fantastic. There was nothing different or new about his mother, except her new black and silver dress: she was

standing there beside him, bending her head a little in her greetings, smiling the same smile she had worn for the half-hour that people had been passing the "receiving" group. Her face was flushed, but the room was warm; and shaking hands with so many people easily accounted for the pretty glow that was upon her. At any time she could have "passed" for twenty-five or twenty-six—a man of fifty would have honestly guessed her to be about thirty but possibly two or three years younger—and though extraordinary in this, she had been extraordinary in it for years. There was nothing in either her looks or her manner to explain George's uncomfortable feeling; and yet it increased, becoming suddenly a vague resentment, as if she had done something unmotherly to him.

The fantastic moment passed; and even while it lasted, he was doing his duty, greeting two pretty girls with whom he had grown up, as people say, and warmly assuring them that he remembered them very well—an assurance which might have surprised them "in anybody but Georgie Minafer!" It seemed unnecessary, since he had spent many hours with them no longer ago than the preceding August. They had with them their parents and an uncle from out of town; and George negligently gave the parents the same assurance he had given the daughters, but murmured another form of greeting to the out-of-town uncle, whom he had never seen before. This person George absently took note of as a "queer-looking duck." Undergraduates had not yet adopted "bird." It was a period previous to that in which a sophomore would have thought of the Sharon girls' uncle as a "queer-looking bird," or, perhaps a "funny-face bird." In George's time, every human male was to be defined, at pleasure, as a "duck"; but "duck" was not spoken with admiring affection, as in its former feminine use to signify a "dear"—on the contrary, "duck" implied the speaker's personal detachment and humorous superiority. An indifferent amusement was what George felt when his mother, with a gentle

emphasis, interrupted his interchange of courtesies with the nieces to present him to the queer-looking duck, their uncle. This emphasis of Isabel's, though slight, enabled George to perceive that she considered the queer-looking duck a person of some importance; but it was far from enabling him to understand why. The duck parted his thick and longish black hair on the side; his tie was a forgetful looking thing, and his coat, though it fitted a good enough middle-aged figure, no product of this year, or of last year either. One of his eyebrows was noticeably higher than the other; and there were whimsical lines between them, which gave him an apprehensive expression; but his apprehensions were evidently more humorous than profound, for his prevailing look was that of a genial man of affairs, not much afraid of anything whatever. Nevertheless, observing only his unfashionable hair, his eyebrows, his preoccupied tie and his old coat, the olympic George set him down as a queer-looking duck, and having thus completed his portrait, took no interest in him.

The Sharon girls passed on, taking the queer-looking duck with them, and George became pink with mortification as his mother called his attention to a white-bearded guest waiting to shake his hand. This was George's great-uncle, old John Minafer: it was old John's boast that in spite of his connection by marriage with the Ambersons, he never had worn and never would wear a swaller-tail coat. Members of his family had exerted their influence uselessly—at eighty-nine conservative people seldom form radical new habits, and old John wore his "Sunday suit" of black broadcloth to the Amberson ball. The coat was square, with skirts to the knees; old John called it a "Prince Albert" and was well enough pleased with it, but his great-nephew considered it the next thing to an insult. George's purpose had been to ignore the man, but he had to take his hand for a moment; whereupon old John began to tell George that he was looking well, though there had been a time, during his fourth month, when he was so puny that nobody thought he would live.

The great-nephew, in a fury of blushes, dropped old John's hand with some vigour, and seized that of the next person in the line. "'Member you v'ry well 'ndeed!" he said fiercely.

The large room had filled, and so had the broad hall and the rooms on the other side of the hall, where there were tables for whist. The imported orchestra waited in the ballroom on the third floor, but a local harp, 'cello, violin, and flute were playing airs from "The Fencing Master" in the hall, and people were shouting over the music. Old John Minafer's voice was louder and more penetrating than any other, because he had been troubled with deafness for twenty-five years, heard his own voice but faintly, and liked to hear it. "Smell o' flowers like this always puts me in mind o' funerals," he kept telling his niece, Fanny Minafer, who was with him; and he seemed to get a great deal of satisfaction out of this reminder. His tremulous yet strident voice cut through the voluminous sound that filled the room, and he was heard everywhere: "Always got to think o' funerals when I smell so many flowers!" And, as the pressure of people forced Fanny and himself against the white marble mantelpiece, he pursued this train of cheery thought, shouting, "Right here's where the Major's wife was laid out at *her* funeral. They had her in a good light from that big bow window." He paused to chuckle mournfully. "I s'pose that's where they'll put the Major when *his* time comes."

Presently George's mortification was increased to hear this sawmill droning harshly from the midst of the thickening crowd: "Ain't the dancin' broke out yet, Fanny? Hoopla! Le's push through and go see the young women-folks crack their heels! Start the circus! Hoopse-daisy!" Miss Fanny Minafer, in charge of the lively veteran, was almost as distressed as her nephew George, but she did her duty and managed to get old John through the press and out to the broad stairway, which numbers of young people were now ascending to the ballroom. And here the sawmill voice still rose over all others: "Solid black walnut every inch of it, balustrades and all. Sixty thousand dollars' worth o' carved wood-

work in the house! Like water! Spent money like water! Always did! Still do! Like water! God knows where it all comes from!"

He continued the ascent, barking and coughing among the gleaming young heads, white shoulders, jewels, and chiffon, like an old dog slowly swimming up the rapids of a sparkling river; while down below, in the drawing-room, George began to recover from the degradation into which this relic of early settler days had dragged him. What restored him completely was a dark-eyed little beauty of nineteen, very knowing in lustrous blue and jet; at sight of this dashing advent in the line of guests before him, George was fully an Amberson again.

"Remember you very well *indeed!*" he said, his graciousness more earnest than any he had heretofore displayed. Isabel heard him and laughed.

"But you don't, George!" she said. "You don't remember her yet, though of course you *will!* Miss Morgan is from out of town, and I'm afraid this is the first time you've ever seen her. You might take her up to the dancing; I think you've pretty well done your duty here."

"Be d'lighted," George responded formally, and offered his arm, not with a flourish, certainly, but with an impressiveness inspired partly by the appearance of the person to whom he offered it, partly by his being the hero of this fête, and partly by his youthfulness—for when manners are new they are apt to be elaborate. The little beauty entrusted her gloved fingers to his coat-sleeve, and they moved away together.

Their progress was necessarily slow, and to George's mind it did not lack stateliness. How could it? Musicians, hired, especially for him, were sitting in a grove of palms in the hall and now tenderly playing "Oh, Promise Me" for his pleasuring; dozens and scores of flowers had been brought to life and tended to this hour that they might sweeten the air for him while they died; and the evanescent power that music and floral scents hold over youth stirred

his appreciation of strange, beautiful qualities within his own bosom: he seemed to himself to be mysteriously angelic, and about to do something dramatic which would overwhelm the beautiful young stranger upon his arm.

Elderly people and middle-aged people moved away to let him pass with his honoured fair beside him. Worthy middle-class creatures, they seemed, leading dull lives but appreciative of better things when they saw them—and George's bosom was fleetingly touched with a pitying kindness. And since the primordial day when caste or heritage first set one person, in his own esteem, above his fellow-beings, it is to be doubted if anybody ever felt more illustrious, or more negligently grand, than George Amberson Minafer felt at this party.

As he conducted Miss Morgan through the hall, toward the stairway, they passed the open double doors of a card room, where some squadrons of older people were preparing for action, and, leaning gracefully upon the mantelpiece of this room, a tall man, handsome, high-mannered, and sparklingly point-device, held laughing converse with that queer-looking duck, the Sharon girls' uncle. The tall gentleman waved a gracious salutation to George, and Miss Morgan's curiosity was stirred. "Who is that?"

"I didn't catch his name when my mother presented him to me," said George. "You mean the queer-looking duck."

"I mean the aristocratic duck."

"That's my Uncle George. Honourable George Amberson. I thought everybody knew him."

"He looks as though everybody ought to know him," she said. "It seems to run in your family."

If she had any sly intention, it skipped over George harmlessly. "Well, of course, I suppose most everybody does," he admitted—"out in this part of the country especially. Besides, Uncle George is in Congress; the family like to have someone there."

"Why?"

"Well, it's sort of a good thing in one way. For instance,

my Uncle Sydney Amberson and his wife, Aunt Amelia, they haven't got much of anything to do with themselves—get bored to death around here, of course. Well, probably Uncle George'll have Uncle Sydney appointed minister or ambassador, or something like that, to Russia or Italy or somewhere, and that'll make it pleasant when any of the rest of the family go travelling, or things like that. I expect to do a good deal of travelling myself when I get out of college."

On the stairway he pointed out this prospective ambassadorial couple, Sydney and Amelia. They were coming down, fronting the ascending tide, and as conspicuous over it as a king and queen in a play. Moreover, as the clear-eyed Miss Morgan remarked, the very least they looked was ambassadorial. Sydney was an Amberson exaggerated, more pompous than gracious; too portly, flushed, starched to a shine, his stately jowl furnished with an Edward the Seventh beard. Amelia, likewise full-bodied, showed glittering blond hair exuberantly dressed; a pink, fat face cold under a white-hot tiara; a solid, cold bosom under a white-hot necklace; great, cold, gloved arms, and the rest of her beautifully upholstered. Amelia was an Amberson born, herself, Sydney's second-cousin: they had no children, and Sydney was without a business or a profession; thus both found a great deal of time to think about the appropriateness of their becoming Excellencies. And as George ascended the broad stairway, they were precisely the aunt and uncle he was most pleased to point out, to a girl from out of town, as his appurtenances in the way of relatives. At sight of them the grandeur of the Amberson family was instantly conspicuous as a permanent thing: it was impossible to doubt that the Ambersons were entrenched, in their nobility and riches, behind polished and glittering barriers which were as solid as they were brilliant, and would last.

CHAPTER V

THE hero of the fête, with the dark-eyed little beauty upon his arm, reached the top of the second flight of stairs; and here, beyond a spacious landing, where two proud-like darkies tended a crystalline punch bowl, four wide archways in a rose-vine lattice framed gliding silhouettes of waltzers, already smoothly at it to the castanets of "*La Paloma*." Old John Minafer, evidently surfeited, was in the act of leaving these delights. "D'want 'ny more o' that!" he barked. "Just slidin' around! Call that dancin'? Rather see a jig any day in the world! They ain't very modest, some of 'em. I don't mind *that*, though. Not me!"

Miss Fanny Minafer was no longer in charge of him: he emerged from the ballroom escorted by a middle-aged man of commonplace appearance. The escort had a dry, lined face upon which, not ornamentally but as a matter of course, there grew a business man's short moustache; and his thin neck showed an Adam's apple, but not conspicuously, for there was nothing conspicuous about him. Baldish, dim, quiet, he was an unnoticeable part of this festival, and although there were a dozen or more middle-aged men present, not casually to be distinguished from him in general aspect, he was probably the last person in the big house at whom a stranger would have glanced twice. It did not enter George's mind to mention to Miss Morgan that this was his father, or to say anything whatever about him.

Mr. Minafer shook his son's hand unobtrusively in passing.

"I'll take Uncle John home," he said, in a low voice. "Then I guess I'll go on home myself—I'm not a great hand at parties, you know. Good-night, George."

George murmured a friendly enough good-night without

pausing. Ordinarily he was not ashamed of the Minafers; he seldom thought about them at all, for he belonged, as most American children do, to the mother's family—but he was anxious not to linger with Miss Morgan in the vicinity of old John, whom he felt to be a disgrace.

He pushed brusquely through the fringe of calculating youths who were gathered in the arches, watching for chances to dance only with girls who would soon be taken off their hands, and led his stranger lady out upon the floor. They caught the time instantly, and were away in the waltz.

George danced well, and Miss Morgan seemed to float as part of the music, the very dove itself of "*La Paloma.*" They said nothing as they danced; her eyes were cast down all the while—the prettiest gesture for a dancer—and there was left in the universe, for each of them, only their companionship in this waltz; while the faces of the other dancers, swimming by, denoted not people but merely blurs of colour. George became conscious of strange feelings within him: an exaltation of soul, tender, but indefinite, and seemingly located in the upper part of his diaphragm.

The stopping of the music came upon him like the waking to an alarm clock; for instantly six or seven of the calculating persons about the entryways bore down upon Miss Morgan to secure dances. George had to do with one already established as a belle, it seemed.

"Give me the next and the one after that," he said hurriedly, recovering some presence of mind, just as the nearest applicant reached them. "And give me every third one the rest of the evening."

She laughed. "Are you asking?"

"What do you mean, 'asking'?"

"It sounded as though you were just telling me to give you all those dances."

"Well, I want 'em!" George insisted.

"What about all the other girls it's your duty to dance with?"

"They'll have to go without," he said heartlessly; and

then, with surprising vehemence: "Here! I want to know: Are you going to give me those——"

"Good gracious!" she laughed. "Yes!"

The applicants flocked round her, urging contracts for what remained, but they did not dislodge George from her side, though he made it evident that they succeeded in annoying him; and presently he extricated her from an accumulating siege—she must have connived in the extrication—and bore her off to sit beside him upon the stairway that led to the musicians' gallery, where they were sufficiently retired, yet had a view of the room.

"How'd all those ducks get to know you so quick?" George inquired, with little enthusiasm.

"Oh, I've been here a week."

"Looks as if you'd been pretty busy!" he said. "Most of those ducks, I don't know what my mother wanted to invite 'em here for."

"Don't you like them?"

"Oh, I used to see something of a few of 'em. I was president of a club we had here, and some of 'em belonged to it, but I don't care much for that sort of thing any more. I really don't see why my mother invited 'em."

"Perhaps it was on account of their parents," Miss Morgan suggested mildly. "Maybe she didn't want to offend their fathers and mothers."

"Oh, hardly! I don't think my mother need worry much about offending anybody in this old town."

"It must be wonderful," said Miss Morgan. "It must be wonderful, Mr. Amberson—Mr. Minafer, I mean."

"What must be wonderful?"

"To be so important as that!"

"*That* isn't 'important,'" George assured her. "Anybody that really is anybody ought to be able to do about as they like in their own town, I should think!"

She looked at him critically from under her shading lashes—but her eyes grew gentler almost at once. In truth, they became more appreciative than critical. George's im-

perious good looks were altogether manly, yet approached actual beauty as closely as a boy's good looks should dare; and dance-music and flowers have some effect upon nineteen-year-old girls as well as upon eighteen-year-old boys. Miss Morgan turned her eyes slowly from George, and pressed her face among the lilies-of-the-valley and violets of the pretty bouquet she carried, while, from the gallery above, the music of the next dance carolled out merrily in a new two-step. The musicians made the melody gay for the Christmas-time with chimes of sleighbells, and the entrance to the shadowed stairway framed the passing flushed and lively dancers, but neither George nor Miss Morgan suggested moving to join the dance.

The stairway was draughty: the steps were narrow and uncomfortable; no older person would have remained in such a place. Moreover, these two young people were strangers to each other; neither had said anything in which the other had discovered the slightest intrinsic interest; there had not arisen between them the beginnings of congeniality, or even of friendliness—but stairways near ballrooms have more to answer for than have moonlit lakes and mountain sunsets. Some day the laws of glamour must be discovered, because they are so important that the world would be wiser now if Sir Isaac Newton had been hit on the head, not by an apple, but by a young lady.

Age, confused by its own long accumulation of follies, is everlastingly inquiring, "What does *she* see in *him?*" as if young love came about through thinking—or through conduct. Age wants to know: "What on earth can they *talk* about?" as if talking had anything to do with April rains! At seventy, one gets up in the morning, finds the air sweet under a bright sun, feels lively; thinks, "I am hearty, today," and plans to go for a drive. At eighteen, one goes to a dance, sits with a stranger on a stairway, feels peculiar, thinks nothing, and becomes incapable of any plan whatever. Miss Morgan and George stayed where they were.

They had agreed to this in silence and without knowing

it; certainly without exchanging glances of intelligence—they had exchanged no glances at all. Both sat staring vaguely out into the ballroom, and, for a time, they did not speak. Over their heads the music reached a climax of vivacity: drums, cymbals, triangle, and sleighbells, beating, clashing, tinkling. Here and there were to be seen couples so carried away that, ceasing to move at the decorous, even glide, considered most knowing, they pranced and whirled through the throng, from wall to wall, galloping bounteously in abandon. George suffered a shock of vague surprise when he perceived that his aunt, Fanny Minafer, was the lady-half of one of these wild couples.

Fanny Minafer, who rouged a little, was like fruit which in some climates dries with the bloom on. Her features had remained prettily childlike; so had her figure, and there were times when strangers, seeing her across the street, took her to be about twenty; there were other times when at the same distance they took her to be about sixty, instead of forty, as she was. She had old days and young days; old hours and young hours; old minutes and young minutes; for the change might be that quick. An alteration in her expression, or a difference in the attitude of her head, would cause astonishing indentations to appear—and behold, Fanny was an old lady! But she had been never more childlike than she was to-night as she flew over the floor in the capable arms of the queer-looking duck; for this person was her partner.

The queer-looking duck had been a real dancer in his day, it appeared; and evidently his day was not yet over. In spite of the headlong, gay rapidity with which he bore Miss Fanny about the big room, he danced authoritatively, avoiding without effort the lightest collision with other couples, maintaining sufficient grace throughout his wildest moments, and all the while laughing and talking with his partner. What was most remarkable to George, and a little irritating, this stranger in the Amberson Mansion had no vestige of the air of deference proper to a stranger in such a place: he seemed

thoroughly at home. He seemed offensively so, indeed, when, passing the entrance to the gallery stairway, he disengaged his hand from Miss Fanny's for an instant, and not pausing in the dance, waved a laughing salutation more than cordial, then capered lightly out of sight.

George gazed stonily at this manifestation, responding neither by word nor sign. "How's that for a bit of freshness?" he murmured.

"What was?" Miss Morgan asked.

"That queer-looking duck waving his hand at me like that. Except he's the Sharon girls' uncle I don't know him from Adam."

"You don't need to," she said. "He wasn't waving his hand to you: he meant me."

"Oh, he did?" George was not mollified by the explanation. "Everybody seems to mean you! You certainly do seem to've been pretty busy this week you've been here!"

She pressed her bouquet to her face again, and laughed into it, not displeased. She made no other comment, and for another period neither spoke. Meanwhile the music stopped; loud applause insisted upon its renewal; an encore was danced; there was an interlude of voices; and the changing of partners began.

"Well," said George finally, "I must say you don't seem to be much of a prattler. They say it's a great way to get a reputation for being wise, never saying much. Don't you ever talk *any?*"

"When people can understand," she answered.

He had been looking moodily out at the ballroom but he turned to her quickly, at this, saw that her eyes were sunny and content, over the top of her bouquet; and he consented to smile.

"Girls are usually pretty fresh!" he said. "They ought to go to a man's college about a year: they'd get taught a few things about freshness! What you got to do after two o'clock to-morrow afternoon?"

"A whole lot of things. Every minute filled up."

"All right," said George. "The snow's fine for sleighing: I'll come for you in a cutter at ten minutes after two."

"I can't possibly go."

"If you don't," he said, "I'm going to sit in the cutter in front of the gate, wherever you're visiting, all afternoon, and if you try to go out with anybody else he's got to whip me before he gets you." And as she laughed—though she blushed a little, too—he continued, seriously: "If you think I'm not in earnest you're at liberty to make quite a big experiment!"

She laughed again. "I don't think I've often had so large a compliment as that," she said, "especially on such short notice—and yet, I don't think I'll go with you."

"You be ready at ten minutes after two."

"No, I won't."

"Yes, you will!"

"Yes," she said, "I will!" And her partner for the next dance arrived, breathless with searching.

"Don't forget I've got the third from now," George called after her.

"I won't."

"And every third one after that."

"I know!" she called, over her partner's shoulder, and her voice was amused—but meek.

When the "third from now" came, George presented himself before her without any greeting, like a brother, or a mannerless old friend. Neither did she greet him, but moved away with him, concluding, as she went, an exchange of badinage with the preceding partner: she had been talkative enough with him, it appeared. In fact, both George and Miss Morgan talked much more to every one else that evening, than to each other; and they said nothing at all at this time. Both looked preoccupied, as they began to dance, and preserved a gravity of expression to the end of the number. And when "the third one after that" came, they did not dance, but went back to the gallery stairway, seeming to have reached

an understanding without any verbal consultation, that this suburb was again the place for them.

"Well," said George, coolly, when they were seated, "what did you say your name was?"

"Morgan."

"Funny name!"

"Everybody else's name always is."

"I didn't mean it was really funny," George explained. "That's just one of my crowd's bits of horsing at college. We always say 'funny name' no matter what it is. I guess we're pretty fresh sometimes; but I knew your name was Morgan because my mother said so downstairs. I meant: what's the rest of it?"

"Lucy."

He was silent.

"Is 'Lucy' a funny name, too?" she inquired.

"No. Lucy's very much all right!" he said, and he went so far as to smile. Even his Aunt Fanny admitted that when George smiled "in a certain way" he was charming.

"Thanks about letting my name be Lucy," she said.

"How old are you?" George asked.

"I don't really know, myself."

"What do you mean: you don't really know yourself?"

"I mean I only know what they tell me. I believe them, of course, but believing isn't really knowing. You believe some certain day is your birthday—at least, I suppose you do—but you don't really know it is because you can't remember."

"Look here!" said George. "Do you always talk like this?"

Miss Lucy Morgan laughed forgivingly, put her young head on one side, like a bird, and responded cheerfully: "I'm willing to learn wisdom. What are you studying in school?"

"College!"

"At the university! Yes. What are you studying there?"

George laughed. "Lot o' useless guff!"

"Then why don't you study some useful guff?"

"What do you mean: 'useful'?"

"Something you'd use later, in your business or profession?"

George waved his hand impatiently. "I don't expect to go into any 'business or profession.'"

"No?"

"Certainly not!" George was emphatic, being sincerely annoyed by a suggestion which showed how utterly she failed to comprehend the kind of person he was.

"Why not?" she asked mildly.

"Just look at 'em!" he said, almost with bitterness, and he made a gesture presumably intended to indicate the business and professional men now dancing within range of vision. "That's a fine career for a man, isn't it! Lawyers, bankers, politicians! What do they get out of life, I'd like to know! What do they ever know about *real* things? Where do they ever *get?*"

He was so earnest that she was surprised and impressed. Evidently he had deep-seated ambitions, for he seemed to speak with actual emotion of these despised things which were so far beneath his planning for the future. She had a vague, momentary vision of Pitt, at twenty-one, prime minister of England; and she spoke, involuntarily in a lowered voice, with deference:

"What do you want to be?" she asked.

George answered promptly.

"A yachtsman," he said.

CHAPTER VI

HAVING thus, in a word, revealed his ambitions for a career above courts, marts, and polling booths, George breathed more deeply than usual, and, turning his face from the lovely companion whom he had just made his confidant, gazed out at the dancers with an expression in which there were both sternness and a contempt for the squalid lives of the unyachted Midlanders before him. However, among them, he marked his mother; and his sombre grandeur relaxed momentarily; a more genial light came into his eyes.

Isabel was dancing with the queer-looking duck; and it was to be noted that the lively gentleman's gait was more sedate than it had been with Miss Fanny Minafer, but not less dexterous and authoritative. He was talking to Isabel as gaily as he had talked to Miss Fanny, though with less laughter, and Isabel listened and answered eagerly: her colour was high and her eyes had a look of delight. She saw George and the beautiful Lucy on the stairway, and nodded to them. George waved his hand vaguely: he had a momentary return of that inexplicable uneasiness and resentment which had troubled him downstairs.

"How lovely your mother is!" Lucy said.

"I think she is," he agreed gently.

"She's the gracefulest woman in that ballroom. She dances like a girl of sixteen."

"Most girls of sixteen," said George, "are bum dancers. Anyhow, I wouldn't dance with one unless I had to."

"Well, you'd better dance with your mother! I never saw anybody lovelier. How wonderfully they dance together!"

"Who?"

"Your mother and—and the queer-looking duck," said Lucy. "I'm going to dance with him pretty soon."

"I don't care—so long as you don't give him one of the numbers that belong to me."

"I'll try to remember," she said, and thoughtfully lifted to her face the bouquet of violets and lilies, a gesture which George noted without approval.

"Look here! Who sent you those flowers you keep makin' such a fuss over?"

"He did."

"Who's 'he'?"

"The queer-looking duck."

George feared no such rival; he laughed loudly. "I s'pose he's some old widower!" he said, the object thus described seeming ignominious enough to a person of eighteen, without additional characterization. "Some old widower!"

Lucy became serious at once. "Yes, he is a widower," she said. "I ought to have told you before; he's my father."

George stopped laughing abruptly. "Well, that's a horse on me. If I'd known he was your father of course I wouldn't have made fun of him. I'm sorry."

"Nobody could make fun of him," she said quietly.

"Why couldn't they?"

"It wouldn't make him funny: it would only make themselves silly."

Upon this, George had a gleam of intelligence. "Well, I'm not going to make myself silly any more, then; I don't want to take chances like that with *you*. But I thought he was the Sharon girls' uncle. He came with them——"

"Yes," she said. "I'm always late to everything: I wouldn't let them wait for me. We're visiting the Sharons."

"About time I knew that! You forget my being so fresh about your father, will you? Of course he's a distinguished looking man, in a way."

Lucy was still serious. "'In a way'?" she repeated. "You mean, not in your way, don't you?"

George was perplexed. "How do you mean: not in my way?"

"People pretty often say 'in a way' and 'rather distinguished looking,' or 'rather' so-and-so, or 'rather' anything, to show that *they're* superior, don't they? In New York last month I overheard a climber sort of woman speaking of me as 'little Miss Morgan,' but she didn't mean my height; she meant that she was important. Her husband spoke of a friend of mine as 'little Mr. Pembroke' and 'little Mr. Pembroke' is six-feet-three. This husband and wife were really so terribly unimportant that the only way they knew to pretend to be important was calling people 'little' Miss or Mister so-and-so. It's a kind of snob slang, I think. Of course people don't always say 'rather' or 'in a way' to be superior."

"I should say not! I use both of 'em a great deal myself," said George. "One thing I don't see though: What's the use of a man being six-feet-three? Men that size can't handle themselves as well as a man about five-feet-eleven and a half can. Those long, gangling men, they're nearly always too kind of wormy to be any good in athletics, and they're so awkward they keep falling over chairs or——"

"Mr. Pembroke is in the army," said Lucy primly. "He's extraordinarily graceful."

"In the army? Oh, I suppose he's some old friend of your father's."

"They got on very well," she said, "after I introduced them."

George was a straightforward soul, at least. "See here!" he said. "Are you engaged to anybody?"

"No."

Not wholly mollified, he shrugged his shoulders. "You seem to know a good many people! Do you live in New York?"

"No. We don't live anywhere."

"What you mean: you don't live anywhere?"

"We've lived all over," she answered. "Papa used to live here in this town, but that was before I was born."

"What do you keep moving around so for? Is he a promoter?"

"No. He's an inventor."

"What's he invented?"

"Just lately," said Lucy, "he's been working on a new kind of horseless carriage."

"Well, I'm sorry for him," George said, in no unkindly spirit. "Those things are never going to amount to anything. People aren't going to spend their lives lying on their backs in the road and letting grease drip in their faces. Horseless carriages are pretty much a failure, and your father better not waste his time on 'em."

"Papa'd be so grateful," she returned, "if he could have your advice."

Instantly George's face became flushed. "I don't know that I've done anything to be insulted for!" he said. "I don't see that what I said was particularly fresh."

"No, indeed!"

"Then what do you——"

She laughed gaily. "I don't! And I don't mind your being such a lofty person at all. I think it's ever so interesting—but papa's a great man!"

"Is he?" George decided to be good-natured. "Well, let us hope so. I hope so, I'm sure."

Looking at him keenly, she saw that the magnificent youth was incredibly sincere in this bit of graciousness. He spoke as a tolerant, elderly statesman might speak of a promising young politician; and with her eyes still upon him, Lucy shook her head in gentle wonder. "I'm just beginning to understand," she said.

"Understand what?"

"What it means to be a real Amberson in this town. Papa told me something about it before we came, but I see he didn't say half enough!"

George superbly took this all for tribute. "Did your father say he knew the family before he left here?"

"Yes. I believe he was particularly a friend of your Uncle George; and he didn't say so, but I imagine he must have known your mother very well, too. He wasn't an inventor

then; he was a young lawyer. The town was smaller in those days, and I believe he was quite well known."

"I dare say. I've no doubt the family are all very glad to see him back, especially if they used to have him at the house a good deal, as he told you."

"I don't think he meant to boast of it," she said. "He spoke of it quite calmly."

George stared at her for a moment in perplexity, then perceiving that her intention was satirical, "Girls really ought to go to a man's college," he said—"just a month or two, anyhow. It'd take *some* of the freshness out of 'em!"

"I can't believe it," she retorted, as her partner for the next dance arrived. "It would only make them a little politer on the surface—they'd be really just as awful as ever, after you got to know them a few minutes."

"What do you mean: 'after you got to know them a——'"

She was departing to the dance. "Janie and Mary Sharon told me all about what sort of a *little* boy you were," she said, over her shoulder. "You must think it out!"

She took wing away on the breeze of the waltz, and George, having stared gloomily after her for a few moments, postponed filling an engagement, and strolled round the fluctuating outskirts of the dance to where his uncle, George Amberson, stood smilingly watching, under one of the rose-vine arches at the entrance to the room.

"Hello, young namesake," said the uncle. "Why lingers the laggard heel of the dancer? Haven't you got a partner?"

"She's sitting around waiting for me somewhere," said George. "See here: Who is this fellow Morgan that Aunt Fanny Minafer was dancing with awhile ago?"

Amberson laughed. "He's a man with a pretty daughter, Georgie. Meseemed you've been spending the evening noticing something of that sort—or do I err?"

"Never mind! What sort is he?"

"I think we'll have to give him a character, Georgie. He's an old friend; used to practise law here—perhaps he had more debts than cases, but he paid 'em all up before he left town.

Your question is purely mercenary, I take it: you want to know his true worth before proceeding further with the daughter. I cannot inform you, though I notice signs of considerable prosperity in that becoming dress of hers. However, you never can tell. It is an age when every sacrifice is made for the young, and how your own poor mother managed to provide those genuine pearl studs for you out of her allowance from father, I can't——"

"Oh, dry up!" said the nephew. "I understand this Morgan——"

"Mr. Eugene Morgan," his uncle suggested. "Politeness requires that the young should——"

"I guess the 'young' didn't know much about politeness in your day," George interrupted. "I understand that Mr. Eugene Morgan used to be a great friend of the family."

"Oh, the Minafers?" the uncle inquired, with apparent innocence. "No, I seem to recall that he and your father were not——"

"I mean the Ambersons," George said impatiently. "I understand he was a good deal around the house here."

"What is your objection to that, George?"

"What do you mean: my objection?"

"You seemed to speak with a certain crossness."

"Well," said George, "I meant he seems to feel awfully at home here. The way he was dancing with Aunt Fanny——"

Amberson laughed. "I'm afraid your Aunt Fanny's heart was stirred by ancient recollections, Georgie."

"You mean she used to be silly about him?"

"She wasn't considered singular," said the uncle. "He was —he was popular. Could you bear a question?"

"What do you mean: could I bear——"

"I only wanted to ask: Do you take this same passionate interest in the parents of every girl you dance with? Perhaps it's a new fashion we old bachelors ought to take up. Is it the thing this year to——"

"Oh, go on!" said George, moving away. "I only wanted to know——" He left the sentence unfinished, and crossed

the room to where a girl sat waiting for his nobility to find time to fulfil his contract with her for this dance.

"Pardon f' keep' wait," he muttered, as she rose brightly to meet him; and she seemed pleased that he came at all—but George was used to girls looking radiant when he danced with them, and she had little effect upon him. He danced with her perfunctorily, thinking the while of Mr. Eugene Morgan and his daughter. Strangely enough, his thoughts dwelt more upon the father than the daughter, though George could not possibly have given a reason—even to himself—for this disturbing preponderance.

By a coincidence, though not an odd one, the thoughts and conversation of Mr. Eugene Morgan at this very time were concerned with George Amberson Minafer, rather casually, it is true. Mr. Morgan had retired to a room set apart for smoking, on the second floor, and had found a grizzled gentleman lounging in solitary possession.

"'Gene Morgan!" this person exclaimed, rising with great heartiness. "I'd heard you were in town—I don't believe you know me!"

"Yes, I do, Fred Kinney!" Mr. Morgan returned with equal friendliness. "Your real face—the one I used to know—it's just underneath the one you're masquerading in to-night. You ought to have changed it more if you wanted a disguise."

"Twenty years!" said Mr. Kinney. "It makes some difference in faces, but more in behaviour!"

"It does *so!*" his friend agreed with explosive emphasis. "My own behaviour began to be different about that long ago—quite suddenly."

"I remember," said Mr. Kinney sympathetically. "Well, life's odd enough as we look back."

"Probably it's going to be odder still—if we could look forward."

"Probably."

They sat and smoked.

"However," Mr. Morgan remarked presently, "I still dance like an Indian. Don't you?"

"No. I leave that to my boy Fred. He does the dancing for the family."

"I suppose he's upstairs hard at it?"

"No, he's not here." Mr. Kinney glanced toward the open door and lowered his voice. "He wouldn't come. It seems that a couple of years or so ago he had a row with young Georgie Minafer. Fred was president of a literary club they had, and he said this young Georgie got himself elected instead, in an overbearing sort of way. Fred's red-headed, you know—I suppose you remember his mother? You were at the wedding——"

"I remember the wedding," said Mr. Morgan. "And I remember your bachelor dinner—most of it, that is."

"Well, my boy Fred's as red-headed now," Mr. Kinney went on, "as his mother was then, and he's very bitter about his row with Georgie Minafer. He says he'd rather burn his foot off than set it inside any Amberson house or any place else where young Georgie is. Fact is, the boy seemed to have so much feeling over it I had my doubts about coming myself, but my wife said it was all nonsense; we mustn't humour Fred in a grudge over such a little thing, and while she despised that Georgie Minafer, herself, as much as anyone else did, she wasn't going to miss a big Amberson show just on account of a boys' rumpus, and so on and so on; and so we came."

"Do people dislike young Minafer generally?"

"I don't know about 'generally.' I guess he gets plenty of toadying; but there's certainly a lot of people that are glad to express their opinions about him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Too much Amberson, I suppose, for one thing. And for another his mother just fell down and worshipped him from the day he was born. That's what beats me! I don't have to tell you what Isabel Amberson is, Eugene Morgan. She's got a touch of the Amberson high stuff about her, but you can't get anybody that ever knew her to deny that she's just about the finest woman in the world."

"No," said Eugene Morgan. "You can't get anybody to deny that."

"Then I can't see how she doesn't see the truth about that boy. He thinks he's a little tin god on wheels—and honestly, it makes some people weak and sick just to think about him! Yet that high-spirited, intelligent woman, Isabel Amberson, actually sits and worships him! You can hear it in her voice when she speaks to him or speaks of him. You can see it in her eyes when she looks at him. My Lord! What *does* she see when she looks at him?"

Morgan's odd expression of genial apprehension deepened whimsically, though it denoted no actual apprehension whatever, and cleared away from his face altogether when he smiled; he became surprisingly winning and persuasive when he smiled. He smiled now, after a moment, at this question of his old friend. "She sees something that we don't see," he said.

"What does she see?"

"An angel."

Kinney laughed aloud. "Well, if she sees an angel when she looks at Georgie Minafer, she's a funnier woman than I thought she was!"

"Perhaps she is," said Morgan. "But that's what she sees."

"My Lord! It's easy to see you've only known him an hour or so. In that time have you looked at Georgie and seen an angel?"

"No. All I saw was a remarkably good-looking fool-boy with the pride of Satan and a set of nice new drawing-room manners that he probably couldn't use more than half an hour at a time without busting."

"Then what——"

"Mothers are right," said Morgan. "Do you think this young George is the same sort of creature when he's with his mother that he is when he's bulldozing your boy Fred? Mothers see the angel in us because the angel is there. If it's shown to the mother, the son has got an angel to show, hasn't he? When a son cuts somebody's throat the mother only sees it's

possible for a misguided angel to act like a devil!—and she's entirely right about that!"

Kinney laughed, and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I remember what a fellow you always were to argue," he said. "You mean Georgie Minafer is as much of an angel as any murderer is, and that Georgie's mother is always right."

"I'm afraid she always has been," Morgan said lightly.

The friendly hand remained upon his shoulder. "She was wrong once, old fellow. At least, so it seemed to me."

"No," said Morgan, a little awkwardly. "No——"

Kinney relieved the slight embarrassment that had come upon both of them: he laughed again. "Wait till you know young Georgie a little better," he said. "Something tells me you're going to change your mind about his having an angel to show, if you see anything of him!"

"You mean beauty's in the eye of the beholder, and the angel is all in the eye of the mother. If you were a painter, Fred, you'd paint mothers with angels' eyes holding imps in their laps. Me, I'll stick to the Old Masters and the cherubs."

Mr. Kinney looked at him musingly. "Somebody's eyes must have been pretty angelic," he said, "if they've been persuading you that Georgie Minafer is a cherub!"

"They are," said Morgan heartily. "They're more angelic than ever." And as a new flourish of music sounded overhead he threw away his cigarette, and jumped up briskly. "Good-bye, I've got this dance with her."

"With whom?"

"With Isabel!"

The grizzled Mr. Kinney affected to rub his eyes. "It startles me, your jumping up like that to go and dance with Isabel Amberson! Twenty years seem to have passed!—but have they? Tell me, have you danced with poor old Fanny, too, this evening?"

"Twice!"

"My Lord!" Kinney groaned, half in earnest. "Old times starting all over again! My Lord!"

"Old times?" Morgan laughed gaily from the doorway.

"Not a bit! There aren't any old times. When times are gone they're not old, they're dead! There aren't any times but new times!"

And he vanished in such a manner that he seemed already to have begun dancing.

CHAPTER VII

THE appearance of Miss Lucy Morgan the next day, as she sat in George's fast cutter, proved so charming that her escort was stricken to soft words instantly, and failed to control a poetic impulse. Her rich little hat was trimmed with black fur; her hair was almost as dark as the fur; a great boa of black fur was about her shoulders; her hands were vanished into a black muff; and George's laprobe was black. "You look like—" he said. "Your face looks like—it looks like a snowflake on a lump of coal. I mean a—a snowflake that would be a rose-leaf, too!"

"Perhaps you'd better look at the reins," she returned. "We almost upset just then."

George declined to heed this advice. "Because there's too much pink in your cheeks for a snowflake," he continued. "What's that fairy story about snow-white and rose-red——"

"We're going pretty fast, Mr. Minafer!"

"Well, you see, I'm only here for two weeks."

"I mean the sleigh!" she explained. "We're not the only people on the street, you know."

"Oh, *they'll* keep out of the way."

"That's very patrician charioteering, but it seems to me a horse like this needs guidance. I'm sure he's going almost twenty miles an hour."

"That's nothing," said George; but he consented to look forward again. "He can trot under three minutes, all right." He laughed. "I suppose your father thinks he can build a horseless carriage to go that fast!"

"They go that fast already, sometimes."

"Yes," said George; "they do—for about a hundred feet! Then they give a yell and burn up."

Evidently she decided not to defend her father's faith in

horseless carriages, for she laughed, and said nothing. The cold air was polka-dotted with snow-flakes, and trembled to the loud, continuous jingling of sleighbells. Boys and girls, all aglow and panting jets of vapour, darted at the passing sleighs to ride on the runners, or sought to rope their sleds to any vehicle whatever, but the fleetest no more than just touched the flying cutter, though a hundred soggy mittens grasped for it, then reeled and whirled till sometimes the wearers of those daring mittens plunged flat in the snow and lay a-sprawl, reflecting. For this was the holiday time, and all the boys and girls in town were out, most of them on National Avenue.

But there came panting and chugging up that flat thoroughfare a thing which some day was to spoil all their sleigh-time merriment—save for the rashest and most disobedient. It was vaguely like a topless surrey, but cumbrous with unwholesome excrescences fore and aft, while underneath were spinning leather belts and something that whirred and howled and seemed to stagger. The ride-stealers made no attempt to fasten their sleds to a contrivance so nonsensical and yet so fearsome. Instead, they gave over their sport and concentrated all their energies in their lungs, so that up and down the street the one cry shrilled increasingly: "Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Mister, why don't you git a hoss?" But the mahout in charge, sitting solitary on the front seat, was unconcerned—he laughed, and now and then ducked a snowball without losing any of his good-nature. It was Mr. Eugene Morgan who exhibited so cheerful a countenance between the forward visor of a deer-stalker cap and the collar of a fuzzy gray ulster. "Git a hoss!" the children shrieked, and gruffer voices joined them. "Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Git a *hoss!*"

George Minafer was correct thus far: the twelve miles an hour of such a machine would never overtake George's trotter. The cutter was already scurrying between the stone pillars at the entrance to Amberson Addition.

"That's my grandfather's," said George, nodding toward the Amberson Mansion.

"I ought to know that!" Lucy exclaimed. "We stayed there late enough last night: papa and I were almost the last to go. He and your mother and Miss Fanny Minafer got the musicians to play another waltz when everybody else had gone downstairs and the fiddles were being put away in their cases. Papa danced part of it with Miss Minafer and the rest with your mother. Miss Minafer's your aunt, isn't she?"

"Yes; she lives with us. I tease her a good deal."

"What about?"

"Oh, anything handy—whatever's easy to tease an old maid about."

"Doesn't she mind?"

"She usually has sort of a grouch on me," laughed George. "Nothing much. That's our house just beyond grandfather's." He waved a sealskin gauntlet to indicate the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. "It's almost the same as grandfather's, only not as large and hasn't got a regular ballroom. We gave the dance, last night, at grandfather's on account of the ballroom, and because I'm the only grandchild, you know. Of course, some day that'll be my house, though I expect my mother will most likely go on living where she does now, with father and Aunt Fanny. I suppose I'll probably build a country house, too—somewhere East, I guess." He stopped speaking, and frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowse upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie, and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that rat-trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped. I suppose he doesn't

notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he *wears*, well enough, but—well, look at that!" He pointed to a statue of Minerva, one of the cast-iron sculptures Major Amberson had set up in opening the Addition years before. Minerva was intact, but a blackish streak descended unpleasantly from her forehead to the point of her straight nose, and few other streaks were sketched in a repellent dinge upon the folds of her drapery.

"That must be from soot," said Lucy. "There are so many houses around here."

"Anyhow, somebody ought to see that these statues are kept clean. My grandfather owns a good many of these houses, I guess, for renting. Of course, he sold most of the lots—there aren't any vacant ones, and there used to be heaps of 'em when I was a boy. Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many of these people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build houses on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all too much built up. The way it used to be, it was like a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land, it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the trades-people boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the trades-people they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From 'the family'? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperturbed. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did not, for, as she lifted her muff to her face, he asked:

"What are you laughing at now?"

"Why?"

"You always seem to have some little sceret of your own to get happy over!"

"'Always!'" she exclaimed. "What a big word, when we only met last night!"

"That's another case of it," he said, with obvious sincerity. "One of the reasons I don't like you—much!—is you've got that way of seeming quietly superior to everybody else."

"I!" she cried. "I have?"

"Oh, you think you keep it sort of confidential to yourself, but it's plain enough! I don't believe in that kind of thing."

"You don't?"

"No," said George emphatically. "Not with *me!* I think the world's like this: there's a few people that their birth and position, and so on, puts them at the top, and they ought to treat each other entirely as equals." His voice betrayed a little emotion as he added, "I wouldn't speak like this to everybody."

"You mean you're confiding your deepest creed—or code, whatever it is—to me?"

"Go on, make fun of it, then!" George said bitterly. "You do think you're terribly clever! It makes me tired!"

"Well, as you don't like my seeming 'quietly superior,' after this I'll be noisily superior," she returned cheerfully. "We aim to please!"

"I had a notion before I came for you to-day that we were going to quarrel," he said.

"No, we won't; it takes two!" She laughed and waved her muff toward a new house, not quite completed, standing in a field upon their right. They had passed beyond Amberson Addition, and were leaving the northern fringes of the town for the open country. "Isn't that a beautiful house!" she exclaimed. "Papa and I call it our Beautiful House."

George was not pleased. "Does it belong to you?"

"Of course not! Papa brought me out here the other day, driving in his machine, and we both loved it. It's so spacious and dignified and plain."

"Yes, it's plain enough!" George grunted.

"Yet it's lovely; the gray-green roof and shutters give just enough colour, with the trees, for the long white walls. It seems to me the finest house I've seen in this part of the country."

George was outraged by an enthusiasm so ignorant—not ten minutes ago they had passed the Amberson Mansion. "Is that a sample of your taste in architecture?" he asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Because it strikes me you better go somewhere and study the subject a little!"

Lucy looked puzzled. "What makes you have so much feeling about it? Have I offended you?"

"'Offended' nothing!" George returned brusquely. "Girls usually think they know it all as soon as they've learned to dance and dress and flirt a little. They never know anything about things like architecture, for instance. That house is about as bum a house as any house I ever saw!"

"Why?"

"'Why?'" George repeated. "Did you ask me 'why?'"

"Yes."

"Well, for one thing"— he paused—"for one thing—well just look at it! I shouldn't think you'd have to do any more than look at it if you'd ever given any attention to architecture."

"What is the matter with its architecture, Mr. Minafer?"

"Well, it's this way," said George. "It's like this. Well, for instance, that house—well, it was built like a town house." He spoke of it in the past tense, because they had now left it far behind them—a human habit of curious significance. "It was like a house meant for a street in the city. What kind of a house was that for people of any taste to build out here in the country?"

"But papa says it's built that way on purpose. There are a lot of other houses being built in this direction, and papa says the city's coming out this way; and in a year or two that house will be right in town."

"It was a bum house, anyhow," said George crossly. "I don't even know the people that are building it. They say a lot of riffraff come to town every year nowadays and there's other riffraff that have always lived here, and have made a little money, and act as if they owned the place. Uncle Sydney was talking about it yesterday: he says he and some of his friends are organizing a country club, and already some of these riffraff are worming into it—people he never heard of at all! Anyhow, I guess it's pretty clear you don't know a great deal about architecture."

She demonstrated the completeness of her amiability by laughing. "I'll know something about the North Pole before long," she said, "if we keep going much farther in this direction!"

At this he was remorseful. "All right, we'll turn and drive south awhile till you get warmed up again. I expect we have been going against the wind about long enough. Indeed, I'm sorry!"

He said, "Indeed, I'm sorry," in a nice way, and looked very strikingly handsome when he said it, she thought. No doubt it is true that there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repented than over all the saints who consistently remain holy, and the rare, sudden gentlenesses of arrogant people have infinitely more effect than the continual gentleness of gentle people. Arrogance turned gentle melts the heart; and Lucy gave her companion a little sidelong, sunny nod of acknowledgment. George was dazzled by the quick glow of her eyes, and found himself at a loss for something to say.

Having turned about, he kept his horse to a walk, and at this gait the sleighbells tinkled but intermittently. Gleaming wanly through the whitish vapour that kept rising from the trotter's body and flanks, they were like tiny fog-bells, and made the only sounds in a great winter silence. The white

road ran between lonesome rail fences; and frozen barnyards beyond the fences showed sometimes a harrow left to rust, with its iron seat half filled with stiffened snow, and sometimes an old dead buggy, its wheels forever set, it seemed, in the solid ice of deep ruts. Chickens scratched the metallic earth with an air of protest, and a masterless ragged colt looked up in sudden horror at the mild tinkle of the passing bells, then blew fierce clouds of steam at the sleigh. The snow no longer fell, and far ahead, in a grayish cloud that lay upon the land, was the town.

Lucy looked at this distant thickening reflection. "When we get this far out we can see there must be quite a little smoke hanging over the town," she said. "I suppose that's because it's growing. As it grows bigger it seems to get ashamed of itself, so it makes this cloud and hides in it. Papa says it used to be a bit nicer when he lived here: he always speaks of it differently—he always has a gentle look, a particular tone of voice, I've noticed. He must have been very fond of it. It must have been a lovely place: everybody must have been so jolly. From the way he talks, you'd think life here then was just one long midsummer serenade. He declares it was always sunshiny, that the air wasn't like the air anywhere else—that, as he remembers it, there always seemed to be gold-dust in the air. I doubt it! I think it doesn't seem to be duller air to him now just on account of having a little soot in it sometimes, but probably because he was twenty years younger then. It seems to me the gold-dust he thinks was here is just his being young that he remembers. I think it was just youth. It *is* pretty pleasant to be young, isn't it?" She laughed absently, then appeared to become wistful. "I wonder if we really do enjoy it as much as we'll look back and think we did! I don't suppose so. Anyhow, for my part I feel as if I must be missing something about it, somehow, because I don't seem to be thinking about what's happening at the present moment; I'm always looking forward to something—thinking about things that will happen when I'm older."

"You're a funny girl," George said gently. "But your voice

sounds pretty nice when you think and talk along together like that!"

The horse shook himself all over, and the impatient sleigh-bells made his wish audible. Accordingly, George tightened the reins, and the cutter was off again at a three-minute trot, no despicable rate of speed. It was not long before they were again passing Lucy's Beautiful House, and here George thought fit to put an appendix to his remark. "You're a funny girl, and you know a lot—but I don't believe you know much about architecture!"

Coming toward them, black against the snowy road, was a strange silhouette. It approached moderately and without visible means of progression, so the matter seemed from a distance; but as the cutter shortened the distance, the silhouette was revealed to be Mr. Morgan's horseless carriage, conveying four people atop: Mr. Morgan with George's mother beside him, and, in the rear seat, Miss Fanny Minafer and the Honourable George Amberson. All four seemed to be in the liveliest humour, like high-spirited people upon a new adventure; and Isabel waved her handkerchief dashingly as the cutter flashed by them.

"For the Lord's sake!" George gasped.

"Your mother's a dear," said Lucy. "And she does wear the most bewitching *things!* She looked like a Russian princess, though I doubt if they're that handsome."

George said nothing; he drove on till they had crossed Amberson Addition and reached the stone pillars at the head of National Avenue. There he turned.

"Let's go back and take another look at that old sewing-machine," he said. "It certainly is the weirdest, craziest——"

He left the sentence unfinished, and presently they were again in sight of the old sewing-machine. George shouted mockingly.

Alas! three figures stood in the road, and a pair of legs, with the toes turned up, indicated that a fourth figure lay upon its back in the snow, beneath a horseless carriage that had decided to need a horse.

George became vociferous with laughter, and coming up at his trotter's best gait, snow spraying from runners and every hoof, swerved to the side of the road and shot by, shouting, "Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Git a hoss!"

Three hundred yards away he turned and came back, racing; leaning out as he passed, to wave jeeringly at the group about the disabled machine: "Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Git a——"

The trotter had broken into a gallop, and Lucy cried a warning: "Be careful!" she said. "Look where you're driving! There's a ditch on that side. *Look*——"

George turned too late; the cutter's right runner went into the ditch and snapped off; the little sleigh upset, and, after dragging its occupants some fifteen yards, left them lying together in a bank of snow. Then the vigorous young horse kicked himself free of all annoyances, and disappeared down the road, galloping cheerfully.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN George regained some measure of his presence of mind, Miss Lucy Morgan's cheek, snowy and cold, was pressing his nose slightly to one side; his right arm was firmly about her neck; and a monstrous amount of her fur boa seemed to mingle with an equally unplausible quantity of snow in his mouth. He was confused, but conscious of no objection to any of these juxtapositions. She was apparently uninjured, for she sat up, hatless, her hair down, and said mildly:

"Good heavens!"

Though her father had been under his machine when they passed, he was the first to reach them. He threw himself on his knees beside his daughter, but found her already laughing, and was reassured. "They're all right," he called to Isabel, who was running toward them, ahead of her brother and Fanny Minafer. "This snowbank's a feather bed—nothing the matter with them at all. Don't look so pale!"

"Georgie!" she gasped. "*Georgie!*"

Georgie was on his feet, snow all over him.

"Don't make a fuss, mother! Nothing's the matter. That darned silly horse——"

Sudden tears stood in Isabel's eyes. "To see you down underneath—dragging—oh!——" Then with shaking hands she began to brush the snow from him.

"Let me alone," he protested. "You'll ruin your gloves. You're getting snow all over you, and——"

"No, no!" she cried. "You'll catch cold; you mustn't catch cold!" And she continued to brush him.

Amberson had brought Lucy's hat; Miss Fanny acted as lady's-maid; and both victims of the accident were presently restored to about their usual appearance and condition of

apparel. In fact, encouraged by the two older gentlemen, the entire party, with one exception, decided that the episode was after all a merry one, and began to laugh about it. But George was glummer than the December twilight now swiftly closing in.

"That darned horse!" he said.

"I wouldn't bother about Pendennis, Georgie," said his uncle. "You can send a man out for what's left of the cutter to-morrow, and Pendennis will gallop straight home to his stable: he'll be there a *long* while before we will, because all we've got to depend on to get us home is Gene Morgan's broken-down chafing-dish yonder."

They were approaching the machine as he spoke, and his friend, again underneath it, heard him. He emerged, smiling. "She'll go," he said.

"What!"

"All aboard!"

He offered his hand to Isabel. She was smiling but still pale, and her eyes, in spite of the smile, kept upon George in a shocked anxiety. Miss Fanny had already mounted to the rear seat, and George, after helping Lucy Morgan to climb up beside his aunt, was following. Isabel saw that his shoes were light things of patent leather, and that snow was clinging to them. She made a little rush toward him, and, as one of his feet rested on the iron step of the machine, in mounting, she began to clean the snow from his shoe with her almost aërial lace handkerchief. "You mustn't catch cold!" she cried.

"Stop that!" George shouted, and furiously withdrew his foot.

"Then stamp the snow off," she begged. "You mustn't ride with wet feet."

"They're not!" George roared, thoroughly outraged. "For heaven's sake get in! You're standing in the snow yourself. Get in!"

Isabel consented, turning to Morgan, whose habitual expression of apprehensiveness was somewhat accentuated. He climbed up after her, George Amberson having gone to the

other side. "You're the same Isabel I used to know!" he said in a low voice. "You're a divinely ridiculous woman."

"Am I, Eugene?" she said, not displeased. "'Divinely' and 'ridiculous' just counterbalance each other, don't they? Plus one and minus one equal nothing; so you mean I'm nothing in particular?"

"No," he answered, tugging at a lever. "That doesn't seem to be precisely what I meant. There!" This exclamation referred to the subterranean machinery, for dismaying sounds came from beneath the floor, and the vehicle plunged, then rolled noisily forward.

"Behold!" George Amberson exclaimed. "She does move! It must be another accident."

"'Accident'?" Morgan shouted over the din. "No! She breathes, she stirs; she seems to feel a thrill of life along her keel!" And he began to sing "The Star Spangled Banner."

Amberson joined him lustily, and sang on when Morgan stopped. The twilight sky cleared, discovering a round moon already risen; and the musical congressman hailed this bright presence with the complete text and melody of "The Danube River."

His nephew, behind, was gloomy. He had overheard his mother's conversation with the inventor: it seemed curious to him that this Morgan, of whom he had never heard until last night, should be using the name "Isabel" so easily; and George felt that it was not just the thing for his mother to call Morgan "Eugene"; the resentment of the previous night came upon George again. Meanwhile, his mother and Morgan continued their talk; but he could no longer hear what they said; the noise of the car and his uncle's songful mood prevented. He marked how animated Isabel seemed; it was not strange to see his mother so gay, but it was strange that a man not of the family should be the cause of her gaiety. And George sat frowning.

Fanny Minafer had begun to talk to Lucy. "Your father wanted to prove that his horseless carriage would run, even in the snow," she said. "It really does, too."

"Of course!"

"It's so interesting! He's been telling us how he's going to change it. He says he's going to have wheels all made of rubber and blown up with air. I don't understand what he means at all; I should think they'd explode—but Eugene seems to be very confident. He always was confident, though. It seems so like old times to hear him talk!"

She became thoughtful, and Lucy turned to George. "You tried to swing underneath me and break the fall for me when we went over," she said. "I knew you were doing that, and—it was nice of you."

"Wasn't any fall to speak of," he returned brusquely. "Couldn't have hurt either of us."

"Still it was friendly of you—and awfully quick, too. I'll not—I'll not forget it!"

Her voice had a sound of genuineness, very pleasant; and George began to forget his annoyance with her father. This annoyance of his had not been alleviated by the circumstance that neither of the seats of the old sewing-machine was designed for three people, but when his neighbour spoke thus gratefully, he no longer minded the crowding—in fact, it pleased him so much that he began to wish the old sewing-machine would go even slower. And she had spoken no word of blame for his letting that darned horse get the cutter into the ditch. George presently addressed her hurriedly, almost tremulously, speaking close to her ear:

"I forgot to tell you something: you're pretty nice! I thought so the first second I saw you last night. I'll come for you to-night and take you to the Assembly at the Amberson Hotel. You're going, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm going with papa and the Sharons. I'll see you there."

"Looks to me as if you were awfully conventional," George grumbled; and his disappointment was deeper than he was willing to let her see—though she probably did see. "Well, we'll dance the cotillion together, anyhow."

"I'm afraid not. I promised Mr. Kinney."

"What!" George's tone was shocked, as at incredible news. "Well, you could break *that* engagement, I guess, if you wanted to! Girls always can get out of things when they want to. Won't you?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because I promised him. Several days ago."

George gulped, and lowered his pride, "I don't—oh, look here! I only want to go to that thing to-night to get to see something of you; and if you don't dance the cotillion with me, how can I? I'll only be here two weeks, and the others have got all the rest of your visit to see you. *Won't* you do it, please?"

"I couldn't."

"See here!" said the stricken George. "If you're going to decline to dance that cotillion with me simply because you've promised a—a—a miserable red-headed outsider like Fred Kinney, why we might as well quit!"

"Quit what?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean," he said huskily.

"I don't."

"Well, you ought to!"

"But I don't at all!"

George, thoroughly hurt, and not a little embittered, expressed himself in a short outburst of laughter: "Well, I ought to have seen it!"

"Seen what?"

"That you might turn out to be a girl who'd like a fellow of the red-headed Kinney sort. I ought to have seen it from the first!"

Lucy bore her disgrace lightly. "Oh, dancing a cotillion with a person doesn't mean that you like him—but I don't see anything in particular the matter with Mr. Kinney. What is?"

"If you don't see anything the matter with him for yourself," George responded, icily, "I don't think pointing it out would help you. You probably wouldn't understand."

"You might try," she suggested. "Of course I'm a stranger here, and if people have done anything wrong or have something unpleasant about them, I wouldn't have any way of knowing it, just at first. If poor Mr. Kinney——"

"I prefer not to discuss it," said George curtly. "He's an enemy of mine."

"Why?"

"I prefer not to discuss it."

"Well, but——"

"I prefer not to discuss it!"

"Very well." She began to hum the air of the song which Mr. George Amberson was now discoursing, "O moon of my delight that knows no wane"—and there was no further conversation on the back seat.

They had entered Amberson Addition, and the moon of Mr. Amberson's delight was overlaid by a slender Gothic filagree; the branches that sprang from the shade trees lining the street. Through the windows of many of the houses rosy lights were flickering; and silver tinsel and evergreen wreaths and brilliant little glass globes of silver and wine colour could be seen, and glimpses were caught of Christmas trees, with people decking them by firelight—reminders that this was Christmas Eve. The ride-stealers had disappeared from the highway, though now and then, over the gasping and howling of the horseless carriage, there came a shrill jeer from some young passer-by upon the sidewalk:

"Mister, fer heaven's sake go an' git a hoss! Git a hoss! *Git* a hoss!"

The contrivance stopped with a heart-shaking jerk before Isabel's house. The gentlemen jumped down, helping Isabel and Fanny to descend; there were friendly leavetakings—and one that was not precisely friendly.

"It's 'au revoir,' till to-night, isn't it?" Lucy asked, laughing.

"Good afternoon!" said George, and he did not wait, as his relatives did, to see the old sewing-machine start briskly down the street, toward the Sharons'; its lighter load consist-

ing now of only Mr. Morgan and his daughter. George went into the house at once.

He found his father reading the evening paper in the library. "Where are your mother and your Aunt Fanny?" Mr. Minafer inquired, not looking up.

"They're coming," said his son; and, casting himself heavily into a chair, stared at the fire.

His prediction was verified a few moments later; the two ladies came in cheerfully, unfastening their fur cloaks. "It's all right, Georgie," said Isabel. "Your Uncle George called to us that Pendennis got home safely. Put your shoes close to the fire, dear, or else go and change them." She went to her husband and patted him lightly on the shoulder, an action which George watched with sombre moodiness. "You might dress before long," she suggested. "We're all going to the Assembly, after dinner, aren't we? Brother George said he'd go with us."

"Look here," said George abruptly. "How about this man Morgan and his old sewing-machine? Doesn't he want to get grandfather to put money into it? Isn't he trying to work Uncle George for that? Isn't that what he's up to?"

It was Miss Fanny who responded. "You little silly!" she cried, with surprising sharpness. "What on earth are you talking about? Eugene Morgan's perfectly able to finance his own inventions these days."

"I'll bet he borrows money of Uncle George," the nephew insisted.

Isabel looked at him in grave perplexity. "Why do you say such a thing, George?" she asked.

"He strikes me as that sort of man," he answered doggedly. "Isn't he, father?"

Minafer set down his paper for the moment. "He was a fairly wild young fellow twenty years ago," he said, glancing at his wife absently. "He was like you in one thing, Georgie; he spent too much money—only he didn't have any mother to get money out of a grandfather for him, so he was usually in debt. But I believe I've heard he's done fairly well of late

years. No, I can't say I think he's a swindler, and I doubt if he needs anybody else's money to back his horseless carriage."

"Well, what's he brought the old thing here for, then? People that own elephants don't take their elephants around with 'em when they go visiting. What's he got it here for?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mr. Minafer, resuming his paper. "You might ask him."

Isabel laughed and patted her husband's shoulder again. "Aren't you going to dress? Aren't we all going to the dance?"

He groaned faintly. "Aren't your brother and Georgie escorts enough for you and Fanny?"

"Wouldn't you enjoy it at all?"

"You know I don't."

Isabel let her hand remain upon his shoulder a moment longer; she stood behind him, looking into the fire, and George watching her broodingly, thought there was more colour in her face than the reflection of the flames accounted for. "Well, then," she said indulgently, "stay at home and be happy. We won't urge you if you'd really rather not."

"I really wouldn't," he said contentedly.

Half an hour later, George was passing through the upper hall, in a bath-robe stage of preparation for the evening's gaieties, when he encountered his Aunt Fanny. He stopped her. "Look here!" he said.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" she demanded, regarding him with little amiability. "You look as if you were rehearsing for a villain in a play. Do change your expression!"

His expression gave no sign of yielding to the request; on the contrary, its sombreness deepened. "I suppose you don't know why father doesn't want to go to-night," he said solemnly. "You're his only sister, and yet you don't know!"

"He never wants to go anywhere that I ever heard of," said Fanny. "What *is* the matter with you?"

"He doesn't want to go because he doesn't like this man Morgan."

"Good gracious!" Fanny cried impatiently. "Eugene Morgan isn't in your father's thoughts at all, one way or the other. Why should he be?"

George hesitated. "Well—it strikes me—— Look here, what makes you and—and everybody—so excited over him?"

"'Excited'!" she jeered. "Can't people be glad to see an old friend without silly children like you having to make a to-do about it? I've just been in your mother's room suggesting that she might give a little dinner for them——"

"For who?"

"For *whom*, Georgie! For Mr. Morgan and his daughter."

"Look here!" George said quickly. "Don't do that! Mother mustn't do that. It wouldn't look well."

"'Wouldn't look well'!" Fanny mocked him; and her suppressed vehemence betrayed a surprising acerbity. "See here, Georgie Minafer, I suggest that you just march straight on into your room and finish your dressing! Sometimes you say things that show you have a pretty mean little mind!"

George was so astounded by this outburst that his indignation was delayed by his curiosity. "Why, what upsets *you* this way?" he inquired.

"I know what you mean," she said, her voice still lowered, but not decreasing in sharpness. "You're trying to insinuate that I'd get your mother to invite Eugene Morgan here on my account because he's a widower!"

"I *am?*" George gasped, nonplussed. "I'm trying to insinuate that you're setting your cap at him and getting mother to help you? Is that what you mean?"

Beyond a doubt that was what Miss Fanny meant. She gave him a white-hot look. "You attend to your own affairs!" she whispered fiercely, and swept away.

George, dumbfounded, returned to his room for meditation.

He had lived for years in the same house with his Aunt Fanny, and it now appeared that during all those years he had been thus intimately associated with a total stranger. Never before had he met the passionate lady with whom he had just held a conversation in the hall. So she wanted to get

married! And wanted George's mother to help her with this horseless-carriage widower!

"Well, I *will* be shot!" he muttered aloud. "I will—I certainly will be shot!" And he began to laugh. "Lord 'lmighty!"

But presently, at the thought of the horseless-carriage widower's daughter, his grimness returned, and he resolved upon a line of conduct for the evening. He would nod to her carelessly when he first saw her; and, after that, he would notice her no more: he would not dance with her; he would not favour her in the cotillion—he would not go near her!

. . . He descended to dinner upon the third urgent summons of a coloured butler, having spent two hours dressing—and rehearsing.

CHAPTER IX

THE Honourable George Amberson was a congressman who led cotillions—the sort of congressman an Amberson would be. He did it negligently, to-night, yet with infallible dexterity, now and then glancing humorously at the spectators, people of his own age. They were seated in a tropical grove at one end of the room whither they had retired at the beginning of the cotillion, which they surrendered entirely to the twenties and the late 'teens. And here, grouped with that stately pair, Sydney and Amelia Amberson, sat Isabel with Fanny, while Eugene Morgan appeared to bestow an amiable devotion impartially upon the three sisters-in-law. Fanny watched his face eagerly, laughing at everything he said; Amelia smiled blandly, but rather because of graciousness than because of interest; while Isabel, looking out at the dancers, rhythmically moved a great fan of blue ostrich feathers, listened to Eugene thoughtfully, yet all the while kept her shining eyes on Georgie.

Georgie had carried out his rehearsed projects with precision. He had given Miss Morgan a nod studied into perfection during his lengthy toilet before dinner. "Oh, yes, I do seem to remember that curious little outsider!" this nod seemed to say. Thereafter, all cognizance of her evaporated: the curious little outsider was permitted no further existence worth the struggle. Nevertheless, she flashed in the corner of his eye too often. He was aware of her dancing demurely, and of her viciously flirtatious habit of never looking up at her partner, but keeping her eyes concealed beneath downcast lashes; and he had over-sufficient consciousness of her between the dances, though it was not possible to see her at these times, even if he had cared to look frankly in her direction—she was invisible in a thicket of young dresscoats. The black thicket

moved as she moved, and her location was hatefully apparent, even if he had not heard her voice laughing from the thicket. It was annoying how her voice, though never loud, pursued him. No matter how vociferous were other voices, all about, he seemed unable to prevent himself from constantly recognizing hers. It had a quaver in it, not pathetic—rather humorous than pathetic—a quality which annoyed him to the point of rage, because it was so difficult to get away from. She seemed to be having a "wonderful time!"

An unbearable soreness accumulated in his chest: his dislike of the girl and her conduct increased until he thought of leaving this sickening Assembly and going home to bed. *That* would show her! But just then he heard her laughing, and decided that it wouldn't show her. So he remained.

When the young couples seated themselves in chairs against the walls, round three sides of the room, for the cotillion, George joined a brazen-faced group clustering about the doorway—youths with no partners, yet eligible to be "called out" and favoured. He marked that his uncle placed the infernal Kinney and Miss Morgan, as the leading couple, in the first chairs at the head of the line upon the leader's right; and this disloyalty on the part of Uncle George was inexcusable, for in the family circle the nephew had often expressed his opinion of Fred Kinney. In his bitterness, George uttered a significant monosyllable.

The music flourished; whereupon Mr. Kinney, Miss Morgan, and six of their neighbours rose and waltzed knowingly. Mr. Amberson's whistle blew; then the eight young people went to the favour-table and were given toys and trinkets wherewith to delight the new partners it was now their privilege to select. Around the walls, the seated non-participants in this ceremony looked rather conscious; some chattered, endeavouring not to appear expectant; some tried not to look wistful; and others were frankly solemn. It was a trying moment; and whoever secured a favour, this very first shot, might consider the portents happy for a successful evening.

Holding their twinkling gewgaws in their hands, those

about to bestow honour came toward the seated lines, where expressions became feverish. Two of the approaching girls seemed to wander, not finding a predetermined object in sight; and these two were Janie Sharon, and her cousin, Lucy. At this, George Amberson Minafer, conceiving that he had little to anticipate from either, turned a proud back upon the room and affected to converse with his friend, Mr. Charlie Johnson.

The next moment a quick little figure intervened between the two. It was Lucy, gayly offering a silver sleighbell decked with white ribbon.

"I almost couldn't find you!" she cried.

George stared, took her hand, led her forth in silence, danced with her. She seemed content not to talk; but as the whistle blew, signalling that this episode was concluded, and he conducted her to her seat, she lifted the little bell toward him. "You haven't taken your favour. You're supposed to pin it on your coat," she said. "Don't you want it?"

"If you insist!" said George stiffly. And he bowed her into her chair; then turned and walked away, dropping the sleighbell haughtily into his trousers' pocket.

The figure proceeded to its conclusion, and George was given other sleighbells, which he easily consented to wear upon his lapel; but, as the next figure began, he strolled with a bored air to the tropical grove, where sat his elders, and seated himself beside his Uncle Sydney. His mother leaned across Miss Fanny, raising her voice over the music to speak to him.

"Georgie, nobody will be able to see you here. You'll not be favoured. You ought to be where you can dance."

"Don't care to," he returned. "Bore!"

"But you ought——" She stopped and laughed, waving her fan to direct his attention behind him. "Look! Over your shoulder!"

He turned, and discovered Miss Lucy Morgan in the act of offering him a purple toy balloon.

"I found you!" she laughed.

George was startled. "Well——" he said.

"Would you rather 'sit it out'?" Lucy asked quickly, as he did not move. "I don't care to dance if you——"

"No," he said, rising. "It would be better to dance." His tone was solemn, and solemnly he departed with her from the grove. Solemnly he danced with her.

Four times, with not the slightest encouragement, she brought him a favour: four times in succession. When the fourth came, "Look here!" said George huskily. "You going to keep this up all night? What do you mean by it?"

For an instant she seemed confused. "That's what cotillions are for, aren't they?" she murmured.

"What do you mean: what they're for?"

"So that a girl can dance with a person she wants to?"

George's huskiness increased. "Well, do you mean you—you want to dance with me all the time—all evening?"

"Well, this much of it—evidently!" she laughed.

"Is it because you thought I tried to keep you from getting hurt this afternoon when we upset?"

She shook her head.

"Was it because you want to even things up for making me angry—I mean, for hurting my feelings on the way home?"

With her eyes averted—for girls of nineteen can be as shy as boys, sometimes—she said, "Well—you only got angry because I couldn't dance the cotillion with you. I—I didn't feel terribly hurt with you for getting angry about *that!*"

"Was there any other reason? Did my telling you I liked you have anything to do with it?"

She looked up gently, and, as George met her eyes, something exquisitely touching, yet queerly delightful, gave him a catch in the throat. She looked instantly away, and, turning, ran out from the palm grove, where they stood, to the dancing-floor.

"Come on!" she cried. "Let's dance!"

He followed her.

"See here—I—I——" he stammered. "You mean—— Do you——"

"No, no!" she laughed. "Let's dance!"

He put his arm about her almost tremulously, and they began to waltz. It was a happy dance for both of them.

Christmas day is the children's, but the holidays are youth's dancing-time. The holidays belong to the early twenties and the 'teens, home from school and college. These years possess the holidays for a little while, then possess them only in smiling, wistful memories of holly and twinkling lights and dance-music, and charming faces all aglow. It is the liveliest time in life, the happiest of the irresponsible times in life. Mothers echo its happiness—nothing is like a mother who has a son home from college, except another mother with a son home from college. Bloom does actually come upon these mothers; it is a visible thing; and they run like girls, walk like athletes, laugh like sycophants. Yet they give up their sons to the daughters of other mothers, and find it proud rapture enough to be allowed to sit and watch.

Thus Isabel watched George and Lucy dancing, as together they danced away the holidays of that year into the past.

"They seem to get along better than they did at first, those two children," Fanny Minafer said, sitting beside her at the Sharons' dance, a week after the Assembly. "They seemed to be always having little quarrels of some sort, at first. At least George did: he seemed to be continually pecking at that lovely, dainty, little Lucy, and being cross with her over nothing."

"'*Pecking*'?" Isabel laughed. "What a word to use about Georgie! I think I never knew a more angelically amiable disposition in my life!"

Miss Fanny echoed her sister-in-law's laugh, but it was a rueful echo, and not sweet. "He's amiable to you!" she said. "That's all the side of him you ever happen to see. And why wouldn't be he amiable to anybody that simply fell down and worshipped him every minute of her life? Most of us would!"

"Isn't he worth worshipping? Just look at him! Isn't he

charming with Lucy! See how hard he ran to get it when she dropped her handkerchief back there."

"Oh, I'm not going to argue with you about George!" said Miss Fanny. "I'm fond enough of him, for that matter. He *can* be charming, and he's certainly stunning *looking*, if only——"

"Let the 'if only' go, dear," Isabel suggested good-naturedly. "Let's talk about that dinner you thought I should——"

"I?" Miss Fanny interrupted quickly. "Didn't you want to give it yourself?"

"Indeed, I did, my dear!" said Isabel heartily. "I only meant that unless you had proposed it, perhaps I wouldn't——"

But here Eugene came for her to dance, and she left the sentence uncompleted. Holiday dances can be happy for youth renewed as well as for youth in bud—and yet it was not with the air of a rival that Miss Fanny watched her brother's wife dancing with the widower. Miss Fanny's eyes narrowed a little, but only as if her mind engaged in a hopeful calculation. She looked pleased.

CHAPTER X

A FEW days after George's return to the university it became evident that not quite everybody had gazed with complete benevolence upon the various young collegians at their holiday sports. The Sunday edition of the principal morning paper even expressed some bitterness under the heading, "Gilded Youths of the Fin-de-Siècle"—this was considered the knowing phrase of the time, especially for Sunday supplements—and there is no doubt that from certain references in this bit of writing some people drew the conclusion that Mr. George Amberson Minafer had not yet got his come-upance, a postponement still irritating. Undeniably, Fanny Minafer was one of the people who drew this conclusion, for she cut the article out and enclosed it in a letter to her nephew, having written on the border of the clipping, "I wonder whom it can mean!"

George read part of it:

We debate sometimes what is to be the future of this nation when we think that in a few years public affairs may be in the hands of the *fin-de-siècle* gilded youths we see about us during the Christmas holidays. Such foppery, such luxury, such insolence, was surely never practised by the scented, overbearing patricians of the Palatine, even in Rome's most decadent epoch. In all the wild orgy of wastefulness and luxury with which the nineteenth century reaches its close, the gilded youth has been surely the worst symptom. With his airs of young milord, his fast horses, his gold and silver cigarette-cases, his clothes from a New York tailor, his recklessness of money showered upon him by indulgent mothers or doting grandfathers, he respects nothing and nobody. He is blasé, if you please. Watch him at a social function, how condescendingly he deigns to select a partner for the popular waltz or two-step; how carelessly he shoulders older people out of his way, with what a blank stare he returns

the salutation of some old acquaintance whom he may choose in his royal whim to forget! The unpleasant part of all this is that the young women he so condescendingly selects as partners for the dance greet him with seeming rapture, though in their hearts they must feel humiliated by his languid hauteur, and many older people beam upon him almost fawningly if he unbends so far as to throw a careless, disdainful word!

One wonders what has come over the new generation. Of such as these the Republic was not made. Let us pray that the future of our country is not in the hands of these *fin-de-siècle* gilded youths, but rather in the calloused palms of young men yet unknown, labouring upon the farms of the land. When we compare the young manhood of Abraham Lincoln with the specimens we are now producing, we see too well that it bodes ill for the twentieth century——

George yawned, and tossed the clipping into his waste-basket, wondering why his aunt thought such dull nonsense worth the sending. As for her insinuation, pencilled upon the border, he supposed she meant to joke—a supposition which neither surprised him nor altered his lifelong opinion of her wit.

He read her letter with more interest:

. . . The dinner your mother gave for the Morgans was a lovely affair. It was last Monday evening, just ten days after you left. It was peculiarly appropriate that your mother should give this dinner, because her brother George, your uncle, was Mr. Morgan's most intimate friend before he left here a number of years ago, and it was a pleasant occasion for the formal announcement of some news which you heard from Lucy Morgan before you returned to college. At least she told me she had told you the night before you left that her father had decided to return here to live. It was appropriate that your mother, herself an old friend, should assemble a representative selection of Mr. Morgan's old friends around him at such a time. He was in great spirits and most entertaining. As your time was so charmingly taken up during your visit home with a *younger member* of his family, you probably overlooked opportunities of hearing him talk, and do not know what an interesting man he can be.

He will soon begin to build his factory here for the manufacture

of *automobiles*, which he says is a term he prefers to "horseless carriages." Your Uncle George told me he would like to invest in this factory, as George thinks there is a future for automobiles; perhaps not for general use, but as an interesting novelty, which people with sufficient means would like to own for their amusement and the sake of variety. However, he said Mr. Morgan laughingly declined his offer, as Mr. M. was fully able to finance this venture, though not starting in a very large way. Your uncle said other people are manufacturing automobiles in different parts of the country with success. Your father is not very well, though he is not actually ill, and the doctor tells him he ought not to be so much at his office, as the long years of application indoors with no exercise are beginning to affect him unfavourably, but I believe your father would die if he had to give up his work, which is all that has ever interested him outside of his family. I never could understand it. Mr. Morgan took your mother and me with Lucy to see Modjeska in "Twelfth Night" yesterday evening, and Lucy said she thought the Duke looked rather like you, only much more democratic in his manner. I suppose you will think I have written a great deal about the Morgans in this letter, but thought you would be interested because of your interest in a *younger member* of his family. Hoping that you are finding college still as attractive as ever,

Affectionately,
AUNT FANNY.

George read one sentence in this letter several times. Then he dropped the missive in his waste-basket to join the clipping, and strolled down the corridor of his dormitory to borrow a copy of "Twelfth Night." Having secured one, he returned to his study and refreshed his memory of the play—but received no enlightenment that enabled him to comprehend Lucy's strange remark. However, he found himself impelled in the direction of correspondence, and presently wrote a letter—not a reply to his Aunt Fanny.

DEAR LUCY:

No doubt you will be surprised at hearing from me so soon again, especially as this makes two in answer to the one received from you since getting back to the old place. I hear you have been mak-

ing comments about me at the theatre, that some actor was more democratic in his manners than I am, which I do not understand. You know my theory of life because I explained it to you on our first drive together, when I told you I would not talk to everybody about things I feel like the way I spoke to you of my theory of life. I believe those who are able should have a true theory of life, and I developed my theory of life long, long ago.

Well, here I sit smoking my faithful briar pipe, indulging in the fragrance of my *tabac* as I look out on the campus from my many paned window, and things are different with me from the way they were way back in Freshman year. I can see now how boyish in many ways I was then. I believe what has changed me as much as anything was my visit home at the time I met you. So I sit here with my faithful briar and dream the old dreams over as it were, dreaming of the waltzes we waltzed together and of that last night before we parted, and you told me the good news you were going to live there, and I would *find my friend waiting for me*, when I get home next summer.

I will be glad my friend *will* be waiting for me. I am not capable of friendship except for the very few, and, looking back over my life, I remember there were times when I doubted if I could feel a great friendship for anybody—especially girls. I do not take a great interest in many people, as you know, for I find most of them shallow. Here in the old place I do not believe in being hail-fellow-well-met with every Tom, Dick, and Harry just because he happens to be a classmate, any more than I do at home, where I have always been careful who I was seen with, largely on account of the family, but also because my disposition ever since my boyhood has been to encourage real intimacy from but the few.

What are you reading now? I have finished both "Henry Esmond" and "The Virginians." I like Thackeray because he is not trashy, and because he writes principally of nice people. My theory of literature is an author who does not indulge in trashiness—writes about people you could introduce into your own home. I agree with my Uncle Sydney, as I once heard him say he did not care to read a book or go to a play about people he would not care to meet at his own dinner table. I believe we should live by certain standards and ideals, as you know from my telling you my theory of life.

Well, a letter is no place for deep discussions, so I will not go into the subject. From several letters from my mother, and one from

Aunt Fanny, I hear you are seeing a good deal of the family since I left. I hope sometimes you think of the member who is absent. I got a silver frame for your photograph in New York, and I keep it on my desk. It is the only girl's photograph I ever took the trouble to have framed, though, as I told you frankly, I have had any number of other girls' photographs, yet all were only passing fancies, and oftentimes I have questioned in years past if I was capable of much friendship toward the feminine sex, which I usually found shallow until our own friendship began. When I look at your photograph, I say to myself, "At last, at last here is one that will not prove shallow."

My faithful briar has gone out. I will have to rise and fill it, then once more in the fragrance of My Lady Nicotine, I will sit and dream the old dreams over, and think, too, of the true friend at home awaiting my return in June for the summer vacation.

Friend, this is from your friend,

G. A. M.

George's anticipations were not disappointed. When he came home in June his friend was awaiting him; at least, she was so pleased to see him again that for a few minutes after their first encounter she was a little breathless, and a great deal glowing, and quiet withal. Their sentimental friendship continued, though sometimes he was irritated by her making it less sentimental than he did, and sometimes by what he called her "air of superiority." Her air was usually, in truth, that of a fond but amused older sister; and George did not believe such an attitude was warranted by her eight months of seniority.

Lucy and her father were living at the Amberson Hotel, while Morgan got his small machine-shops built in a western outskirt of the town; and George grumbled about the shabbiness and the old-fashioned look of the hotel though it was "still the best in the place, of course." He remonstrated with his grandfather, declaring that the whole Amberson Estate would be getting "run-down and out-at-heel, if things weren't taken in hand pretty soon." He urged the general need of rebuilding, renovating, varnishing, and lawsuits. But the

Major, declining to hear him out, interrupted querulously, saying that he had enough to bother him without any advice from George; and retired to his library, going so far as to lock the door audibly.

"Second childhood!" George muttered, shaking his head; and he thought sadly that the Major had not long to live. However, this surmise depressed him for only a moment or so. Of course, people couldn't be expected to live forever, and it would be a good thing to have someone in charge of the Estate who wouldn't let it get to looking so rusty that riffraff dared to make fun of it. For George had lately undergone the annoyance of calling upon the Morgans, in the rather stuffy red velours and gilt parlour of their apartment at the hotel, one evening when Mr. Frederick Kinney also was a caller, and Mr. Kinney had not been tactful. In fact, though he adopted a humorous tone of voice, in expressing his sympathy for people who, through the city's poverty in hotels, were obliged to stay at the Amberson, Mr. Kinney's intention was interpreted by the other visitor as not at all humorous, but, on the contrary, personal and offensive.

George rose abruptly, his face the colour of wrath. "Good-night, Miss Morgan. Good-night, Mr. Morgan," he said. "I shall take pleasure in calling at some other time when a more courteous sort of people may be present."

"Look here!" the hot-headed Fred burst out. "Don't you try to make me out a boor, George Minafer! I wasn't hinting anything at you; I simply forgot all about your grandfather owning this old building. Don't you try to put *me* in the light of a boor! I won't——"

But George walked out in the very course of this vehement protest, and it was necessarily left unfinished.

Mr. Kinney remained only a few moments after George's departure; and as the door closed upon him, the distressed Lucy turned to her father. She was plaintively surprised to find him in a condition of immoderate laughter.

"I didn't—I didn't think I could hold out!" he gasped, and, after choking until tears came to his eyes, felt blindly

for the chair from which he had risen to wish Mr. Kinney an indistinct good-night. His hand found the arm of the chair; he collapsed feebly, and sat uttering incoherent sounds.

"Papa!"

"It brings things back so!" he managed to explain. "This very Fred Kinney's father and young George's father, Wilbur Minafer, used to do just such things when they were at that age—and, for that matter, so did George Amberson and I, and all the rest of us!" And, in spite of his exhaustion, he began to imitate: "'Don't you try to put *me* in the light of a boor!' 'I shall take pleasure in calling at some time when a more courteous sort of people——'" He was unable to go on.

There is a mirth for every age, and Lucy failed to comprehend her father's, but tolerated it a little ruefully.

"Papa, I think they were shocking. Weren't they *awful!*"

"Just—just boys!" he moaned, wiping his eyes.

But Lucy could not smile at all; she was beginning to look indignant. "I can forgive that poor Fred Kinney," she said. "He's just blundering—but George—oh, George behaved outrageously!"

"It's a difficult age," her father observed, his calmness somewhat restored. "Girls don't seem to have to pass through it quite as boys do, or their *savoir faire* is instinctive—or something!" And he gave way to a return of his convulsion.

She came and sat upon the arm of his chair. "Papa, *why* should George behave like that?"

"He's sensitive."

"Rather! But why is he? He does anything he likes to, without any regard for what people think. Then why should he mind so furiously when the least little thing reflects upon him, or on anything or anybody connected with him?"

Eugene patted her hand. "That's one of the greatest puzzles of human vanity, dear; and I don't pretend to know the answer. In all my life, the most arrogant people that I've known have been the most sensitive. The people who have done the most in contempt of other people's opinion, and who consider themselves the highest above it, have been the most

furious if it went against them. Arrogant and domineering people can't stand the least, lightest, faintest breath of criticism. It just kills them."

"Papa, do you think George is *terribly* arrogant and domineering?"

"Oh, he's still only a boy," said Eugene consolingly. "There's plenty of fine stuff in him—can't help but be, because he's Isabel Amberson's son."

Lucy stroked his hair, which was still almost as dark as her own. "You liked her pretty well once, I guess, papa."

"I do still," he said quietly.

"She's lovely—lovely! Papa"—she paused, then continued—"I wonder sometimes——"

"What?"

"I wonder just how she happened to marry Mr. Minafer."

"Oh, Minafer's all right," said Eugene. "He's a quiet sort of man, but he's a good man and a kind man. He always was, and those things count."

"But in a way—well, I've heard people say there wasn't anything to him at all except business and saving money. Miss Fanny Minafer herself told me that everything George and his mother have of their own—that is, just to spend as they like—she says it has always come from Major Amberson."

"Thrift, Horatio!" said Eugene lightly. "Thrift's an inheritance, and a common enough one here. The people who settled the country *had* to save, so making and saving were taught as virtues, and the people, to the third generation, haven't found out that making and saving are only means to an end. Minafer doesn't believe in money being spent. He believes God made it to be invested and saved."

"But George isn't saving. He's reckless, and even if he is arrogant and conceited and bad-tempered, he's awfully generous."

"Oh, he's an Amberson," said her father. "The Ambersons aren't saving. They're too much the other way, most of them."

"I don't think I should have called George bad-tempered," Lucy said thoughtfully. "No. I don't think he is."

"Only when he's cross about something?" Morgan suggested, with a semblance of sympathetic gravity.

"Yes," she said brightly, not perceiving that his intention was humorous. "All the rest of the time he's really very amiable. Of course, he's much more a perfect *child*, the whole time, than he realizes! Her certainly behaved awfully tonight." She jumped up, her indignation returning. "He did, indeed, and it won't do to encourage him in it. I think he'll find me pretty cool—for a week or so!"

Whereupon her father suffered a renewal of his attack of uproarious laughter.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE matter of coolness, George met Lucy upon her own predetermined ground; in fact, he was there first, and, at their next encounter, proved loftier and more formal than she did. Their estrangement lasted three weeks, and then disappeared without any preliminary treaty: it had worn itself out, and they forgot it.

At times, however, George found other disturbances to the friendship. Lucy was "too much the village belle," he complained; and took a satiric attitude toward his competitors, referring to them as her "local swains and bumpkins," sulking for an afternoon when she reminded him that he, too, was at least "local." She was a belle with older people as well; Isabel and Fanny were continually taking her driving, bringing her home with them to lunch or dinner, and making a hundred little engagements with her, and the Major had taken a great fancy to her, insisting upon her presence and her father's at the Amberson family dinner at the Mansion every Sunday evening. She knew how to flirt with old people, he said, as she sat next him at the table on one of these Sunday occasions; and he had always liked her father, even when Eugene was a "terror" long ago. "Oh, yes, he was!" the Major laughed, when she remonstrated. "He came up here with my son George and some others for a serenade one night, and Eugene stepped into a bass fiddle, and the poor musicians just gave up! I had a pretty half-hour getting my son George upstairs, I remember! It was the last time Eugene ever touched a drop—but he'd touched plenty before that, young lady, and he daren't deny it! Well, well; there's another thing that's changed: hardly anybody drinks nowadays. Perhaps it's just as well, but things used to be livelier. That serenade was just before Isabel was married—and don't you fret, Miss

Lucy: your father remembers it well enough!" The old gentleman burst into laughter, and shook his finger at Eugene across the table. "The fact is," the Major went on hilariously, "I believe if Eugene hadn't broken that bass fiddle and given himself away, Isabel would never have taken Wilbur! I shouldn't be surprised if that was about all the reason that Wilbur got her! What do you think, Wilbur?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Wilbur placidly. "If your notion is right, I'm glad 'Gene broke the fiddle. He was giving me a hard run!"

The Major always drank three glasses of champagne at his Sunday dinner, and he was finishing the third. "What do *you* say about it, Isabel? By Jove!" he cried, pounding the table. "She's blushing!"

Isabel did blush, but she laughed. "Who wouldn't blush!" she cried, and her sister-in-law came to her assistance.

"The important thing," said Fanny jovially, "is that Wilbur did get her, and not only got her, but kept her!"

Eugene was as pink as Isabel, but he laughed without any sign of embarrassment other than his heightened colour. "There's another important thing—that is, for me," he said. "It's the only thing that makes me forgive that bass viol for getting in my way."

"What is it?" the Major asked.

"Lucy," said Morgan gently.

Isabel gave him a quick glance, all warm approval, and there was a murmur of friendliness round the table.

George was not one of those who joined in this applause. He considered his grandfather's nonsense indelicate, even for second childhood, and he thought that the sooner the subject was dropped the better. However, he had only a slight recurrence of the resentment which had assailed him during the winter at every sign of his mother's interest in Morgan; though he was still ashamed of his aunt sometimes, when it seemed to him that Fanny was almost publicly throwing herself at the widower's head. Fanny and he had one or two argu-

ments in which her fierceness again astonished and amused him.

"You drop your criticisms of your relatives," she bade him, hotly, one day, "and begin thinking a little about your own behaviour! You say people will 'talk' about my—about my merely being pleasant to an old friend! What do I care how they talk? I guess if people are talking about anybody in this family they're talking about the impertinent little snippet that hasn't any respect for anything, and doesn't even know enough to attend to his own affairs!"

"'Snippet,' Aunt Fanny!" George laughed. "How elegant! And '*little* snippet'—when I'm over five-feet-eleven?"

"I said it!" she snapped, departing. "I don't see how Lucy can stand you!"

"You'd make an amiable stepmother-in-law!" he called after her. "I'll be careful about proposing to Lucy!"

These were but roughish spots in a summer that glided by evenly and quickly enough, for the most part, and, at the end, seemed to fly. On the last night before George went back to be a Junior, his mother asked him confidently if it had not been a happy summer.

He hadn't thought about it, he answered. "Oh, I suppose so. Why?"

"I just thought it would be nice to hear you say so," she said, smiling. "I mean, it's pleasant for people of my age to know that people of your age realize that they're happy."

"People of your age!" he repeated. "You know you don't look precisely like an old woman, mother. Not precisely!"

"No," she said. "And I suppose I feel about as young as you do, inside, but it won't be many years before I must begin to *look* old. It does come!" She sighed, still smiling. "It's seemed to me that it must have been a happy summer for you—a real 'summer of roses and wine'—without the wine, perhaps. 'Gather ye roses while ye may'—or was it primroses? Time does really fly, or perhaps it's more like the sky—and smoke——"

George was puzzled. "What do you mean: time being like the sky and smoke?"

"I mean the things that we have and that we think are so solid—they're like smoke, and time is like the sky that the smoke disappears into. You know how a wreath of smoke goes up from a chimney, and seems all thick and black and busy against the sky, as if it were going to do such important things and last forever, and you see it getting thinner and thinner—and then, in such a little while, it isn't there at all; nothing is left but the sky, and the sky keeps on being just the same forever."

"It strikes me you're getting mixed up," said George cheerfully. "I don't see much resemblance between time and the sky, or between things and smoke-wreaths; but I do see one reason you like Lucy Morgan so much. She talks that same kind of wistful, moony way sometimes—I don't mean to say I mind it in either of you, because I rather like to listen to it, and you've got a very good voice, mother. It's nice to listen to, no matter how much smoke and sky, and so on, you talk. So's Lucy's, for that matter; and I see why you're congenial. She talks that way to her father, too; and he's right there with the same kind of guff. Well, it's all right with *me!*" He laughed, teasingly, and allowed her to retain his hand, which she had fondly seized. "I've got plenty to think about when people drool along!"

She pressed his hand to her cheek, and a tear made a tiny warm streak across one of his knuckles.

"For heaven's sake!" he said. "What's the matter? Isn't everything all right?"

"You're going away!"

"Well, I'm coming back, don't you suppose? Is *that* all that worries you?"

She cheered up, and smiled again, but shook her head. "I never can bear to see you go—that's the most of it. I'm a little bothered about your father, too."

"Why?"

"It seems to me he looks so badly. Everybody thinks so."

"What nonsense!" George laughed. "He's been looking that way all summer. He isn't much different from the way he's looked all his life, that I can see. What's the matter with him?"

"He never talks much about his business to me but I think he's been worrying about some investments he made last year. I think his worry has affected his health."

"What investments?" George demanded. "He hasn't gone into Mr. Morgan's automobile concern, has he?"

"No," Isabel smiled. "The 'automobile concern' is all Eugene's, and it's so small I understand it's taken hardly anything. No; your father has always prided himself on making only the most absolutely safe investments, but two or three years ago he and your Uncle George both put a great deal—pretty much everything they could get together, I think—into the stock of rolling-mills some friends of theirs owned, and I'm afraid the mills haven't been doing well."

"What of that? Father needn't worry. You and I could take care of him the rest of his life on what grandfather——"

"Of course," she agreed. "But your father's always lived so for his business and taken such pride in his sound investments; it's a passion with him. I——"

"Pshaw! *He* needn't worry! You tell him we'll look after him: we'll build him a little stone bank in the backyard, if he busts up, and he can go and put his pennies in it every morning. That'll keep him just as happy as he ever was!" He kissed her. "Good-night, I'm going to tell Lucy good-bye. Don't sit up for me."

She walked to the front gate with him, still holding his hand, and he told her again not to "sit up" for him.

"Yes, I will," she laughed. "You won't be very late."

"Well—it's my last night."

"But I know Lucy, and she knows I want to see you, too, your last night. You'll see: she'll send you home promptly at eleven!"

But she was mistaken: Lucy sent him home promptly at ten.

CHAPTER XII

ISABEL'S uneasiness about her husband's health—sometimes reflected in her letters to George during the winter that followed—had not been alleviated when the accredited Senior returned for his next summer vacation, and she confided to him in his room, soon after his arrival, that "something" the doctor had said to her lately had made her more uneasy than ever.

"Still worrying over his rolling-mills investments?" George asked, not seriously impressed.

"I'm afraid it's past that stage from what Dr. Rainey says. His worries only aggravate his condition now. Dr. Rainey says we ought to get him away."

"Well, let's do it, then."

"He won't go."

"He's a man awfully set in his ways; that's true," said George. "I don't think there's anything much the matter with him, though, and he looks just the same to me. Have you seen Lucy lately? How is she?"

"Hasn't she written you?"

"Oh, about once a month," he answered carelessly. "Never says much about herself. How's she look?"

"She looks—pretty!" said Isabel. "I suppose she wrote you they've moved?"

"Yes; I've got her address. She said they were building."

"They did. It's all finished, and they've been in it a month. Lucy is so capable; she keeps house exquisitely. It's small, but oh, such a pretty little house!"

"Well, that's fortunate," George said. "One thing I've always felt they didn't know a great deal about is architecture."

"Don't they?" asked Isabel, surprised. "Anyhow, their house is charming. It's way out beyond the end of Amberson

Boulevard; it's quite near that big white house with a gray-green roof somebody built out there a year or so ago. There are any number of houses going up, out that way; and the trolley-line runs within a block of them now, on the next street, and the traction people are laying tracks more than a mile beyond. The town is growing almost alarmingly, though not so gigantically as some of the wild young business men seem to believe. Everybody's laughing about dear Mrs. Olliphant's son, Dan: he's put everything he could get hold of into a tract miles beyond nowhere; he calls it 'Ornaby Addition' and makes the most ridiculous orations about it. He wanted your grandfather to invest in it; but of course he wouldn't;—he thinks Dan Olliphant must be insane. I suppose you'll be driving out to see Lucy to-morrow."

"I thought——" George hesitated. "I thought perhaps I'd go after dinner this evening."

At this, his mother laughed, not astonished. "It was only my feeble joke about 'to-morrow,' Georgie! I was pretty sure you couldn't wait that long. Did Lucy write you about the factory?"

"No. What factory?"

"The automobile shops. They had rather a dubious time at first, I'm afraid, and some of Eugene's experiments turned out badly, but this spring they've finished eight automobiles and sold them all, and they've got twelve more almost finished, and they're sold already! Eugene's so gay over it!"

"What do his old sewing-machines look like? Like that first one he had when they came here?"

"No, indeed! These have rubber tires blown up with air—pneumatic! And they aren't so high; they're very easy to get into, and the engine's in front—Eugene thinks that's a great improvement. They're very interesting to look at; behind the driver's seat there's a sort of box where four people can sit, with a step and a little door in the rear, and——"

"I know all about it," said George. "I've seen any number like that, East. You can see all you want of 'em, if you stand on Fifth Avenue half an hour, any afternoon. I've seen half-

a-dozen go by almost at the same time—within a few minutes, anyhow; and of course electric hansoms are a common sight there any day. I hired one, myself, the last time I was there. How fast do Mr. Morgan's machines go?"

"Much *too* fast! It's very exhilarating—but rather frightening; and they do make a fearful uproar. He says, though, he thinks he sees a way to get around the noisiness in time."

"I don't mind the noise," said George. "Give me a horse, for mine, though, any day. I must get up a race with one of these things: Pendennis'll leave it one mile behind in a two-mile run. How's grandfather?"

"He looks well, but he complains sometimes of his heart: I suppose that's natural at his age—and it's an Amberson trouble." Having mentioned this, she looked anxious instantly. "Did *you* ever feel any weakness there, Georgie?"

"No!" he laughed.

"Are you *sure*, dear?"

"No!" And he laughed again. "Did you?"

"Oh, I think not—at least, the doctor told me he thought my heart was about all right. He said I needn't be alarmed."

"I should think not! Women do seem to be always talking about health: I suppose they haven't got enough else to think of!"

"That must be it," she said gayly. "We're an idle lot!"

George had taken off his coat. "I don't like to hint to a lady," he said, "but I do want to dress before dinner."

"Don't be long; I've got to do a lot of looking at you, dear!" She kissed him and ran away, singing.

But his Aunt Fanny was not so fond; and at the dinner-table there came a spark of liveliness into her eye when George patronizingly asked her what was the news in her own "particular line of sport."

"What do you mean, Georgie?" she asked quietly.

"Oh I mean: What's the news in the fast set generally? You been causing any divorces lately?"

"No," said Fanny, the spark in her eye getting brighter. "I haven't been causing anything."

"Well, what's the gossip? You usually hear pretty much everything that goes on around the nooks and crannies in this town, I hear. What's the last from the gossips' corner, auntie?"

Fanny dropped her eyes, and the spark was concealed, but a movement of her lower lip betokened a tendency to laugh, as she replied, "There hasn't been much gossip lately, except the report that Lucy Morgan and Fred Kinney are engaged —and that's quite old, by this time."

Undeniably, this bit of mischief was entirely successful, for there was a clatter upon George's plate. "What—what do you think you're talking about?" he gasped.

Miss Fanny looked up innocently. "About the report of Lucy Morgan's engagement to Fred Kinney."

George turned dumbly to his mother, and Isabel shook her head reassuringly. "People are always starting rumours," she said. "I haven't paid any attention to this one."

"But you—you've heard it?" he stammered.

"Oh, one hears all sorts of nonsense, dear. I haven't the slightest idea that it's true."

"Then you *have* heard it!"

"I wouldn't let it take my appetite," his father suggested drily. "There are plenty of girls in the world!"

George turned pale.

"Eat your dinner, Georgie," his aunt said sweetly. "Food will do you good. I didn't say I knew this rumour was true. I only said I'd heard it."

"When? When did you hear it!"

"Oh, months ago!" And Fanny found any further postponement of laughter impossible.

"Fanny, you're a hard-hearted creature," Isabel said gently. "You *really* are. Don't pay any attention to her, George. Fred Kinney's only a clerk in his uncle's hardware place: he couldn't marry for ages—even if anybody would accept him!"

George breathed tumultuously. "I don't care anything about 'ages'! What's that got to do with it?" he said, his

thoughts appearing to be somewhat disconnected. "'Ages' don't mean anything! I only want to know—I want to know —— I want——" He stopped.

"What do you want?" his father asked crossly. "Why don't you say it? Don't make such a fuss."

"I'm not—not at all," George declared, pushing his chair back from the table.

"You must finish your dinner, dear," his mother urged. "Don't——"

"I have finished. I've eaten all I want. I don't want any more than I wanted. I don't want—I ——" He rose, still incoherent. "I prefer—I want—— Please excuse me!"

He left the room, and a moment later the screens outside the open front door were heard to slam.

"Fanny! You shouldn't——"

"Isabel, don't reproach me. He did have plenty of dinner, and I only told the truth: everybody has been saying——"

"But there isn't any truth in it."

"We don't actually know there isn't," Miss Fanny insisted, giggling. "We've never a*sked* Lucy."

"I wouldn't ask her anything so absurd!"

"George would," George's father remarked. "That's what he's gone to do."

Mr. Minafer was not mistaken: that was what his son had gone to do. Lucy and her father were just rising from their dinner-table when the stirred youth arrived at the front door of the new house. It was a cottage, however, rather than a house; and Lucy had taken a free hand with the architect, achieving results in white and green, outside, and white and blue, inside, to such effect of youth and daintiness that her father complained of "too much springtime!" The whole place, including his own bedroom, was a young damsel's boudoir, he said, so that nowhere could he smoke a cigar without feeling like a ruffian. However, he was smoking when George arrived, and he encouraged George to join him in the pastime, but the caller, whose air was both tense and preoccupied, declined with something like agitation.

"I never smoke—that is, I'm seldom—I mean, no thanks," he said. "I mean not at all. I'd rather not."

"Aren't you well, George?" Eugene asked, looking at him in perplexity. "Have you been overworking at college? You do look rather pa——"

"I don't work," said George. "I mean I don't work. I think, but I don't work. I only work at the end of the term. There isn't much to do."

Eugene's perplexity was little decreased, and a tinkle of the door-bell afforded him obvious relief. "It's my foreman," he said, looking at his watch. "I'll take him out in the yard to talk. This is no place for a foreman." And he departed, leaving the "living-room" to Lucy and George. It was a pretty room, white panelled and blue curtained—and no place for a foreman, as Eugene said. There was a grand piano, and Lucy stood leaning back against it, looking intently at George, while her fingers, behind her, absently struck a chord or two. And her dress was the dress for that room, being of blue and white, too; and the high colour in her cheeks was far from interfering with the general harmony of things—George saw with dismay that she was prettier than ever, and naturally he missed the reassurance he might have felt had he been able to guess that Lucy, on her part, was finding him better looking than ever. For, however unusual the scope of George's pride, vanity of beauty was not included; he did not think about his looks.

"What's wrong, George?" she asked softly.

"What do you mean: 'What's wrong'?"

"You're awfully upset about something. Didn't you get though your examination all right?"

"Certainly I did. What makes you think anything's 'wrong' with me?"

"You do look pale, as papa said, and it seemed to me that the way you talked sounded—well, a little confused."

"'Confused'! I said I didn't care to smoke. What in the world is confused about that?"

"Nothing. But——"

"See here!" George stepped close to her. "Are you glad to see me?"

"You needn't be so fierce about it!" Lucy protested, laughing at his dramatic intensity. "Of course I am! How long have I been looking forward to it?"

"I don't know," he said sharply, abating nothing of his fierceness. "How long have you?"

"Why—ever since you went away!"

"Is that true? Lucy, is that true?"

"You *are* funny!" she said. "Of course it's true. Do tell me what's the matter with you, George!"

"I will!" he exclaimed. "I was a boy when I saw you last. I see that now, though I didn't then. Well, I'm not a boy any longer. I'm a man, and a man has a right to demand a totally different treatment."

"Why has he?"

"What?"

"I don't seem to be able to understand you at all, George. Why shouldn't a boy be treated just as well as a man?"

George seemed to find himself at a loss. "Why shouldn't—— Well, he shouldn't. because a man has a right to certain explanations."

"What explanations?"

"Whether he's been made a toy of!" George almost shouted. "*That's* what I want to know!"

Lucy shook her head despairingly. "You *are* the queerest person! You say you're a man now, but you talk more like a boy than ever. What *does* make you so excited?"

"'Excited'!" he stormed. "Do you dare to stand there and call me 'excited'? I tell you, I never have been more calm or calmer in my life! I don't know that a person needs to be called 'excited' because he demands explanations that are his simple due!"

"What in the world do you want me to explain?"

"Your conduct with Fred *Kinney!*" George shouted.

Lucy uttered a sudden cry of laughter; she was delighted. "It's been awful!" she said. "I don't know that I ever heard

of worse misbehaviour! Papa and I have been twice to dinner with his family, and I've been three times to church with Fred —and once to the circus! I don't know when they'll be here to arrest me!"

"Stop that!" George commanded fiercely. "I want to know just one thing, and I mean to know it, too!"

"Whether I enjoyed the circus?"

"I want to know if you're engaged to him!"

"No!" she cried, and lifting her face close to his for the shortest instant possible, she gave him a look half merry, half defiant, but all fond. It was an adorable look.

"*Lucy!*" he said huskily.

But she turned quickly from him, and ran to the other end of the room. He followed awkwardly, stammering:

"Lucy, I want—I want to ask you. Will you—will you—will you be engaged to *me?*"

She stood at a window, seeming to look out into the summer darkness, her back to him.

"Will you, Lucy?"

"No," she murmured, just audibly.

"Why not?"

"I'm older than you."

"Eight months!"

"You're too young."

"Is that"— he said, gulping—"is that the only reason you won't?"

She did not answer.

As she stood, persistently staring out of the window, with her back to him, she did not see how humble his attitude had become; but his voice was low, and it shook so that she could have no doubt of his emotion. "Lucy, please forgive me for making such a row," he said, thus gently. "I've been—I've been terribly upset—terribly! You know how I feel about you, and always have felt about you. I've shown it in every single thing I've done since the first time I met you, and I know you know it. Don't you?"

Still she did not move or speak.

"Is the only reason you won't be engaged to me you think I'm too young, Lucy?"

"It's—it's reason enough," she said faintly.

At that he caught one of her hands, and she turned to him: there were tears in her eyes, tears which he did not understand at all.

"Lucy, you little dear!" he cried. "I *knew* you——"

"No, no!" she said, and she pushed him away, withdrawing her hand. "George, let's not talk of solemn things."

"'Solemn things'! Like what?"

"Like—being engaged."

But George had become altogether jubilant, and he laughed triumphantly. "Good gracious, *that* isn't solemn!"

"It is, too!" she said, wiping her eyes. "It's too solemn for us."

"No, it isn't! I——"

"Let's sit down and be sensible, dear," she said. "You sit over there——"

"I will if you'll call me 'dear' again."

"No," she said. "I'll only call you that once again this summer—the night before you go away."

"That will have to do, then," he laughed, "so long as I know we're engaged."

"But we're not!" she protested. "And we never will be, if you don't promise not to speak of it again until—until I tell you to!"

"I won't promise that," said the happy George. "I'll only promise not to speak of it till the next time you call me 'dear'; and you've promised to call me that the night before I leave for my senior year."

"Oh, but I didn't!" she said earnestly, then hesitated. "Did I?"

"Didn't you?"

"I don't think I meant it," she murmured, her wet lashes flickering above troubled eyes.

"I know *one* thing about you," he said gayly, his triumph

increasing. "You never went back on anything you said, yet, and I'm not afraid of this being the first time!"

"But we mustn't let——" she faltered; then went on tremulously, "George, we've got on so well together, we won't let this make a difference between us, will we?" And she joined in his laughter.

"It will all depend on what you tell me the night before I go away. You agree we're going to settle things then, don't you, Lucy?"

"I don't promise."

"Yes, you do! Don't you?"

"Well——"

CHAPTER XIII

THAT night George began a jubilant warfare upon his Aunt Fanny, opening the campaign upon his return home at about eleven o'clock. Fanny had retired, and was presumably asleep, but George, on the way to his own room, paused before her door, and serenaded her in a full baritone:

"As I walk along the Boy de Balong
With my independent air,
The people all declare,
'He must be a millionaire!'
Oh, you hear them sigh, and wish to die,
And see them wink the other eye
At the man that broke the bank at Monte Carlo!"

Isabel came from George's room, where she had been reading, waiting for him. "I'm afraid you'll disturb your father, dear. I wish you'd sing more, though—in the day-time. You have a splendid voice."

"Good-night, old lady!"

"I thought perhaps I—— Didn't you want me to come in with you and talk a little?"

"Not to-night. You go to bed. Good-night, old lady!"

He kissed her hilariously, entered his room with a skip, closed his door noisily; and then he could be heard tossing things about, loudly humming "The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo."

Smiling, his mother knelt outside his door to pray; then, with her "Amen," pressed her lips to the bronze door-knob; and went silently to her own apartment.

. . . After breakfasting in bed, George spent the next morning at his grandfather's and did not encounter his Aunt Fanny until lunch, when she seemed to be ready for him.

"Thank you so much for the serenade, George!" she said. "Your poor father tells me he'd just got to sleep for the first time in two nights, but after your kind attentions he lay awake the rest of last night."

"Perfectly true," Mr. Minafer said grimly.

"Of course, I didn't know, sir," George hastened to assure him. "I'm awfully sorry. But Aunt Fanny was so gloomy and excited before I went out, last evening, I thought she needed cheering up."

"*I!*" Fanny jeered. "*I* was gloomy? *I* was excited? You mean about that engagement?"

"Yes. Weren't you? I thought I heard you worrying over somebody's being engaged. Didn't I hear you say you'd heard Mr. Eugene Morgan was engaged to marry some pretty little seventeen-year-old girl?"

Fanny was stung, but she made a brave effort. "Did you ask Lucy?" she said, her voice almost refusing the teasing laugh she tried to make it utter. "Did you ask her when Fred Kinney and she——"

"Yes. *That* story wasn't true. But the other one——" Here he stared at Fanny, and then affected dismay. "Why, what's the matter with your face, Aunt Fanny? It seems agitated!"

"'Agitated!'" Fanny said disdainfully, but her voice undeniably lacked steadiness. "'Agitated!'"

"Oh, come!" Mr. Minafer interposed. "Let's have a little peace!"

"I'm willing," said George. "*I* don't want to see poor Aunt Fanny all stirred up over a rumour I just this minute invented myself. She's so excitable—about certain subjects—it's hard to control her." He turned to his mother. "What's the matter with grandfather?"

"Didn't you see him this morning?" Isabel asked.

"Yes. He was glad to see me, and all that, but he seemed pretty fidgety. Has he been having trouble with his heart again?"

"Not lately. No."

"Well, he's not himself. I tried to talk to him about the

estate; it's disgraceful—it really is—the way things are looking. He wouldn't listen, and he seemed upset. What's he upset over?"

Isabel looked serious; however, it was her husband who suggested gloomily, "I suppose the Major's bothered about this Sydney and Amelia business, most likely."

"What Sydney and Amelia business?" George asked.

"Your mother can tell you, if she wants to," Minafer said. "It's not my side of the family, so I keep off."

"It's rather disagreeable for all of us, Georgie," Isabel began. "You see, your Uncle Sydney wanted a diplomatic position, and he thought brother George, being in Congress, could arrange it. George did get him the offer of a South American ministry, but Sydney wanted a European ambassadorship, and he got quite indignant with poor George for thinking he'd take anything smaller—and he believes George didn't work hard enough for him. George had done his best, of course, and now he's out of Congress, and won't run again—so there's Sydney's idea of a big diplomatic position gone for good. Well, Sydney and your Aunt Amelia are terribly disappointed, and they say they've been thinking for years that this town isn't really fit to live in—'for a gentleman,' Sydney says—and it *is* getting rather big and dirty. So they've sold their house and decided to go abroad to live permanently; there's a villa near Florence they've often talked of buying. And they want father to let them have their share of the estate now, instead of waiting for him to leave it to them in his will."

"Well, I suppose that's fair enough," George said. "That is, in case he intended to leave them a certain amount in his will."

"Of course that's understood, Georgie. Father explained his will to us long ago; a third to them, and a third to brother George, and a third to us."

Her son made a simple calculation in his mind. Uncle George was a bachelor, and probably would never marry; Sydney and Amelia were childless. The Major's only grand-

child appeared to remain the eventual heir of the entire property, no matter if the Major did turn over to Sydney a third of it now. And George had a fragmentary vision of himself, in mourning, arriving to take possession of a historic Florentine villa—he saw himself walking up a cypress-bordered path, with ancient carven stone balustrades in the distance, and servants in mourning livery greeting the new signore. "Well, I suppose it's grandfather's own affair. He can do it or not, just as he likes. I don't see why he'd mind much."

"He seemed rather confused and pained about it," Isabel said. "I think they oughtn't to urge it. George says that the estate won't stand taking out the third that Sydney wants, and that Sydney and Amelia are behaving like a couple of pigs." She laughed, continuing, "Of course *I* don't know whether they are or not: I never have understood any more about business myself than a little pig would! But I'm on George's side, whether he's right or wrong; I always was from the time we were children: and Sydney and Amelia are hurt with me about it, I'm afraid. They've stopped speaking to George entirely. Poor father! Family rows at his time of life."

George became thoughtful. If Sydney and Amelia were behaving like pigs, things might not be so simple as at first they seemed to be. Uncle Sydney and Aunt Amelia might live an *awful* long while, he thought; and besides, people didn't always leave their fortunes to relatives. Sydney might die first, leaving everything to his widow, and some curly-haired Italian adventurer might get round her, over there in Florence; she might be fool enough to marry again—or even adopt somebody!

He became more and more thoughtful, forgetting entirely a plan he had formed for the continued teasing of his Aunt Fanny; and, an hour after lunch, he strolled over to his grandfather's, intending to apply for further information, as a party rightfully interested.

He did not carry out this intention, however. Going into the big house by a side entrance, he was informed that the Major was upstairs in his bedroom, that his sons Sydney and

George were both with him, and that a serious argument was in progress. "You kin stan' right in de middle dat big sta'y-way," said Old Sam, the ancient negro, who was his informant, "an' you kin heah all you a-mind to wivout goin' on up no fudda. Mist' Sydney an' Mist' Jawge talkin' louduh'n I evuh heah nobody ca'y on in nish heah house! Quollin', honey, big quollin'!"

"All right," said George shortly. "You go on back to your own part of the house, and don't make any talk. Hear me?"

"Yessuh, yessuh," Sam chuckled, as he shuffled away. "Plenty talkin' wivout Sam! Yessuh!"

George went to the foot of the great stairway. He could hear angry voices overhead—those of his two uncles—and a plaintive murmur, as if the Major tried to keep the peace.

Such sounds were far from encouraging to callers, and George decided not to go upstairs until this interview was over. His decision was the result of no timidity, nor of a too sensitive delicacy. What he felt was, that if he interrupted the scene in his grandfather's room, just at this time, one of the three gentlemen engaging in it might speak to him in a peremptory manner (in the heat of the moment) and George saw no reason for exposing his dignity to such mischances. Therefore he turned from the stairway, and going quietly into the library, picked up a magazine—but he did not open it, for his attention was instantly arrested by his Aunt Amelia's voice, speaking in the next room. The door was open and George heard her distinctly.

"Isabel does? *Isabel!*" she exclaimed, her tone high and shrewish. "You needn't tell me anything about Isabel Minafer, I guess, my dear old Frank Bronson! I know her a little better than you do, don't you think?"

George heard the voice of Mr. Bronson replying—a voice familiar to him as that of his grandfather's attorney-in-chief and chief intimate as well. He was a contemporary of the Major's, being over seventy, and they had been through three years of the War in the same regiment. Amelia addressed him now, with an effect of angry mockery, as "my dear old Frank

Bronson"; but that (without the mockery) was how the Amberson family almost always spoke of him: "dear old Frank Bronson." He was a hale, thin old man, six feet three inches tall, and without a stoop.

"I doubt your knowing Isabel" he said stiffly. "You speak of her as you do because she sides with her brother George, instead of with you and Sydney."

"*Poot!*" Aunt Amelia was evidently in a passion. "You know what's been going on over there, well enough, Frank Bronson!"

"I don't even know what you're talking about."

"Oh, you don't? You don't know that Isabel takes George's side simply because he's Eugene Morgan's best friend?"

"It seems to me you're talking pure nonsense," said Bronson sharply. "Not impure nonsense, I hope!"

Amelia became shrill. "I thought you were a man of the world: don't tell me you're blind! For nearly two years Isabel's been pretending to chaperone Fanny Minafer with Eugene, and all the time she's been dragging that poor fool Fanny around to chaperone *her* and Eugene! Under the circumstances, she knows people will get to thinking Fanny's a pretty slim kind of chaperone, and Isabel wants to please George because she thinks there'll be less talk if she can keep her own brother around, seeming to approve. 'Talk!' She'd better look out! The whole town will be talking, the first thing she knows! She——"

Amelia stopped, and stared at the doorway in a panic, for her nephew stood there.

She kept her eyes upon his white face for a few strained moments, then, regaining her nerve, looked away and shrugged her shoulders.

"You weren't intended to hear what I've been saying, George," she said quietly. "But since you seem to——"

"Yes, I did."

"So!" She shrugged her shoulders again. "After all, I don't know but it's just as well, in the long run."

He walked up to where she sat. "You—you——" he said

thickly. "It seems—it seems to me you're—you're pretty common!"

Amelia tried to give the impression of an unconcerned person laughing with complete indifference, but the sounds she produced were disjointed and uneasy. She fanned herself, looking out of the open window near her. "Of course, if you want to make more trouble in the family than we've already got, George, with your eavesdropping, you can go and repeat——"

Old Bronson had risen from his chair in great distress. "Your aunt was talking nonsense because she's piqued over a business matter, George," he said. "She doesn't mean what she said, and neither she nor anyone else gives the slightest credit to such foolishness—no one in the world!"

George gulped, and wet lines shone suddenly along his lower eyelids. "They—they'd better not!" he said, then stalked out of the room, and out of the house. He stamped fiercely across the stone slabs of the front porch, descended the steps, and halted abruptly, blinking in the strong sunshine.

In front of his own gate, beyond the Major's broad lawn, his mother was just getting into her victoria, where sat already his Aunt Fanny and Lucy Morgan. It was a summer fashion-picture: the three ladies charmingly dressed, delicate parasols aloft; the lines of the victoria graceful as those of a violin; the trim pair of bays in glistening harness picked out with silver, and the serious black driver whom Isabel, being an Amberson, dared even in that town to put into a black livery coat, boots, white breeches, and cockaded hat. They jingled smartly away, and, seeing George standing on the Major's lawn, Lucy waved, and Isabel threw him a kiss.

But George shuddered, pretending not to see them, and stooped as if searching for something lost in the grass, protracting that posture until the victoria was out of hearing. And ten minutes later, George Amberson, somewhat in the semblance of an angry person plunging out of the Mansion, found a pale nephew waiting to accost him.

"I haven't time to talk, Georgie."

"Yes, you have. You'd better!"

"What's the matter, then?"

His namesake drew him away from the vicinity of the house. "I want to tell you something I just heard Aunt Amelia say, in there."

"I don't want to hear it," said Amberson. "I've been hearing entirely too much of what 'Aunt Amelia says,' lately."

"She says my mother's on your side about this division of the property because you're Eugene Morgan's best friend."

"What in the name of heaven has that got to do with your mother's being on my side?"

"She said——" George paused to swallow. "She said——" He faltered.

"You look sick," said his uncle, and laughed shortly. "If it's because of anything Amelia's been saying, I don't blame you! What else did she say?"

George swallowed again, as with nausea, but under his uncle's encouragement he was able to be explicit. "She said my mother wanted you to be friendly to her about Eugene Morgan. She said my mother had been using Aunt Fanny as a chaperone."

Amberson emitted a laugh of disgust. "It's wonderful what tommy-rot a woman in a state of spite can think of! I suppose you don't doubt that Amelia Amberson created this specimen of tommy-rot herself?"

"I know she did."

"Then what's the matter?"

"She said——" George faltered again. "She said—she implied people were—were talking about it."

"Of all the damn nonsense!" his uncle exclaimed.

George looked at him haggardly. "You're sure they're not?"

"Rubbish! Your mother's on my side about this division because she knows Sydney's a pig and always has been a pig, and so has his spiteful wife. I'm trying to keep them from getting the better of your mother as well as from getting the

better of me, don't you suppose? Well, they're in a rage because Sydney always could do what he liked with father unless your mother interfered, and they know I got Isabel to ask him not to do what they wanted. They're keeping up the fight and they're sore—and Amelia's a woman who always says any damn thing that comes into her head! That's all there is to it."

"But she said," George persisted wretchedly; "she said there was *talk*. She said——"

"Look here, young fellow!" Amberson laughed good-naturedly. "There probably *is* some harmless talk about the way your Aunt Fanny goes after poor Eugene, and I've no doubt I've abetted it myself. People can't help being amused by a thing like that. Fanny was always languishing at him, twenty-odd years ago, before he left here. Well, we can't blame the poor thing if she's got her hopes up again, and I don't know that I blame her, myself, for using your mother the way she does."

"How do you mean?"

Amberson put his hand on George's shoulder. "You like to tease Fanny," he said, "but I wouldn't tease her about this, if I were you. Fanny hasn't got much in her life. You know, Georgie, just being an aunt isn't really the great career it may sometimes appear to you! In fact, I don't know of anything much that Fanny *has* got, except her feeling about Eugene. She's always had it—and what's funny to us is pretty much life-and-death to her, I suspect. Now, I'll not deny that Eugene Morgan is attracted to your mother. He is; and that's another case of 'always was'; but I know him, and he's a knight, George—a crazy one, perhaps, if you've read 'Don Quixote.' And I think your mother likes him better than she likes any man outside her own family, and that he interests her more than anybody else—and 'always has.' And that's all there is to it, except——"

"Except what?" George asked quickly, as he paused.

"Except that I suspect——" Amberson chuckled, and began over: "I'll tell you in confidence. I think Fanny's

a fairly tricky customer, for such an innocent old girl! There isn't any real harm in her, but she's a great diplomatist—lots of cards up her lace sleeves, Georgie! By the way, did you ever notice how proud she is of her arms? Always flashing 'em at poor Eugene!" And he stopped to laugh again.

"I don't see anything confidential about that," George complained. "I thought——"

"Wait a minute! My idea is—don't forget it's a confidential one, but I'm devilish right about it, young Georgie!—it's this: Fanny uses your mother for a decoy duck. She does everything in the world she can to keep your mother's friendship with Eugene going, because she thinks that's what keeps Eugene about the place, so to speak. Fanny's always with your mother, you see; and whenever he sees Isabel he sees Fanny. Fanny thinks he'll get used to the idea of her being around, and some day her chance may come! You see, she's probably afraid—perhaps she even knows, poor thing!—that she wouldn't get to see much of Eugene if it weren't for Isabel's being such a friend of his. There! D'you see?"

"Well—I suppose so." George's brow was still dark, however. "If you're sure whatever talk there is, is about Aunt Fanny. If that's so——"

"Don't be an ass," his uncle advised him lightly, moving away. "I'm off for a week's fishing to forget that woman in there, and her pig of a husband." (His gesture toward the Mansion indicated Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Amberson.) "I recommend a like course to you, if you're silly enough to pay any attention to such rubbishings! Good-bye!"

. . . George was partially reassured, but still troubled: a word haunted him like the recollection of a nightmare. "*Talk!*"

He stood looking at the houses across the street from the Mansion; and though the sunshine was bright upon them, they seemed mysteriously threatening. He had always despised them, except the largest of them, which was the home of his henchman, Charlie Johnson. The Johnsons had originally owned a lot three hundred feet wide, but they had sold

all of it except the meagre frontage before the house itself, and five houses were now crowded into the space where one used to squire it so spaciously. Up and down the street, the same transformation had taken place: every big, comfortable old brick house now had two or three smaller frame neighbours crowding up to it on each side, cheap-looking neighbours, most of them needing paint and not clean—and yet, though they were cheap looking, they had cost as much to build as the big brick houses, whose former ample yards they occupied. Only where George stood was there left a sward as of yore; the great level green lawn that served for both the Major's house and his daughter's. This serene domain—unbroken, except for the two gravelled carriage-drives—alone remained as it had been during the early glories of the Amberson Addition.

George stared at the ugly houses opposite, and hated them more than ever; but he shivered. Perhaps the riffraff living in those houses sat at the windows to watch their betters; perhaps they dared to gossip——

He uttered an exclamation, and walked rapidly toward his own front gate. The victoria had returned with Miss Fanny alone; she jumped out briskly and the victoria waited.

"Where's mother?" George asked sharply, as he met her.

"At Lucy's. I only came back to get some embroidery, because we found the sun too hot for driving. I'm in a hurry."

But, going into the house with her, he detained her when she would have hastened upstairs.

"I haven't time to talk now, Georgie; I'm going right back. I promised your mother——"

"You listen!" said George.

"What on earth——"

He repeated what Amelia had said. This time, however, he spoke coldly, and without the emotion he had exhibited during the recital to his uncle: Fanny was the one who showed agitation during this interview, for she grew fiery red, and her eyes dilated. "What on earth do you want to bring such trash to *me* for?" she demanded, breathing fast.

"I merely wished to know two things: whether it is your duty or mine to speak to father of what Aunt Amelia——"

Fanny stamped her foot. "You little fool!" she cried. "You *awful* little fool!"

"I decline——"

"Decline, my hat! Your father's a sick man, and you——"

"He doesn't seem so to me."

"Well, he does to me! And you want to go troubling him with an Amberson family row! It's just what that cat would *love* you to do!"

"Well, I——"

"Tell your father if you like! It will only make him a little sicker to think he's got a son silly enough to listen to such craziness!"

"Then you're *sure* there isn't any talk?"

Fanny disdained a reply in words. She made a hissing sound of utter contempt and snapped her fingers. Then she asked scornfully: "What's the other thing you wanted to know?"

George's pallor increased. "Whether it mightn't be better, under the circumstances," he said, "if this family were not so intimate with the Morgan family—at least for a time. It might be better——"

Fanny stared at him incredulously. "You mean you'd quit seeing Lucy?"

"I hadn't thought of that side of it, but if such a thing were necessary on account of talk about my mother, I—I——" He hesitated unhappily. "I suggested that if all of us—for a time—perhaps only for a time—it might be better if——"

"See here," she interrupted. "We'll settle this nonsense right now. If Eugene Morgan comes to this house, for instance, to see *me*, your mother can't get up and leave the place the minute he gets here, can she? What do you want her to do: insult him? Or perhaps you'd prefer she'd insult Lucy? That would do just as well. What is it you're up to, anyhow? Do you really love your Aunt Amelia so much that you want to please her? Or do you really hate your Aunt *Fanny* so much that you want to—that you want to——"

She choked and sought for her handkerchief; suddenly she began to cry.

"Oh, see here," George said. "I don't hate you, Aunt Fanny. That's silly. I don't——"

"You do! You *do!* You want to—you want to destroy the only thing—that I—that I ever——" And, unable to continue, she became inaudible in her handkerchief.

George felt remorseful, and his own troubles were lightened: all at once it became clear to him that he had been worrying about nothing. He perceived that his Aunt Amelia was indeed an old cat, and that to give her scandalous meanderings another thought would be the height of folly. By no means insusceptible to such pathos as that now exposed before him, he did not lack pity for Fanny, whose almost spoken confession was lamentable; and he was granted the vision to understand that his mother also pitied Fanny infinitely more than he did. This seemed to explain everything.

He patted the unhappy lady awkwardly upon her shoulder. "There, there!" he said. "I didn't mean anything. Of course the only thing to do about Aunt Amelia is to pay no attention to her. It's all right, Aunt Fanny. Don't cry. I feel a lot better now, myself. Come on; I'll drive back there with you. It's all over, and nothing's the matter. Can't you cheer up?"

Fanny cheered up; and presently the customarily hostile aunt and nephew were driving out Amberson Boulevard amiably together in the hot sunshine.

CHAPTER XIV

"ALMOST" was Lucy's last word on the last night of George's vacation—that vital evening which she had half consented to agree upon for "settling things" between them. "Almost engaged," she meant. And George, discontented with the "almost," but contented that she seemed glad to wear a sapphire locket with a tiny photograph of George Amberson Minafer inside it, found himself wonderful in a new world at the final instant of their parting. For, after declining to let him kiss her "good-bye," as if his desire for such a ceremony were the most preposterous absurdity in the world, she had leaned suddenly close to him and left upon his cheek the veriest feather from a fairy's wing.

She wrote him a month later:

No. It must keep on being almost.

Isn't almost pretty pleasant? You know well enough that I care for you. I did from the first minute I saw you, and I'm pretty sure you knew it—I'm afraid you did. I'm afraid you always knew it. I'm not conventional and cautious about being engaged, as you say I am, dear. (I always read over the "dears" in *your* letters a time or two, as you say you do in mine—only I read all of your letters a time or two!) But it's such a solemn thing it scares me. It means a good deal to a lot of people besides you and me, and that scares me, too. You write that I take your feeling for me "too lightly" and that I "take the whole affair too lightly." Isn't that odd! Because to myself I seem to take it as something so much more solemn than you do. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to find myself an old lady, some day, still thinking of you—while you'd be away and away with somebody else perhaps, and me forgotten ages ago! "Lucy Morgan," you'd say, when you saw my obituary. "Lucy Morgan? Let me see. I seem to remember the name. Didn't I know some Lucy Morgan or other, once upon a time?" Then you'd shake your big white head

and stroke your long white beard—you'd have such a distinguished long white beard! and you'd say, "No. I don't seem to remember any Lucy Morgan; I wonder what made me think I did?" And poor me! I'd be deep in the ground, wondering if you'd heard about it and what you were saying! Good-bye for to-day. Don't work too hard—dear!

George immediately seized pen and paper, plaintively but vigorously requesting Lucy not to imagine him with a beard, distinguished or otherwise, even in the extremities of age. Then, after inscribing his protest in the matter of this visioned beard, he concluded his missive in a tone mollified to tenderness, and proceeded to read a letter from his mother which had reached him simultaneously with Lucy's. Isabel wrote from Asheville, where she had just arrived with her husband.

I think your father looks better already, darling, though we've been here only a few hours. It may be we've found just the place to build him up. The doctors said they hoped it would prove to be, and if it is, it would be worth the long struggle we had with him to get him to give up and come. Poor dear man, he was so blue, not about his health but about giving up the worries down at his office and forgetting them for a time—if he only will forget them! It took the pressure of the family and all his best friends, to get him to come—but father and brother George and Fanny and Eugene Morgan all kept at him so constantly that he just had to give in. I'm afraid that in my anxiety to get him to do what the doctors wanted him to, I wasn't able to back up brother George as I should in his difficulty with Sydney and Amelia. I'm so sorry! George is more upset than I've ever seen him—they've got what they wanted, and they're sailing before long, I hear, to live in Florence. Father said he couldn't stand the constant persuading—I'm afraid the word he used was "nagging." I can't understand people behaving like that. George says they may be Ambersons, but they're vulgar! I'm afraid I almost agree with him. At least, I think they were inconsiderate. But I don't see why I'm unburdening myself of all this to you, poor darling! We'll have forgotten all about it long before you come home for the holidays, and it should mean little or nothing to you, anyway. Forget that I've been so foolish!

Your father is waiting for me to take a walk with him—that's a

splendid sign, because he hasn't felt he could walk much, at home, lately. I mustn't keep him waiting. Be careful to wear your mackintosh and rubbers in rainy weather, and, as soon as it begins to get colder, your ulster. Wish you could see your father now. Looks *so* much better! We plan to stay six weeks if the place agrees with him. It does really seem to already! He's just called in the door to say he's waiting. Don't smoke too much, darling boy.

Devotedly, your mother

ISABEL.

But she did not keep her husband there for the six weeks she anticipated. She did not keep him anywhere that long. Three weeks after writing this letter, she telegraphed suddenly to George that they were leaving for home at once; and four days later, when he and a friend came whistling into his study, from lunch at the club, he found another telegram upon his desk.

He read it twice before he comprehended its import.

Papa left us at ten this morning, dearest.

MOTHER.

The friend saw the change in his face. "Not bad news?"

George lifted utterly dumbfounded eyes from the yellow paper.

"My father," he said weakly. "She says—she says he's *dead*. I've got to go home."

. . . His Uncle George and the Major met him at the station when he arrived—the first time the Major had ever come to meet his grandson. The old gentleman sat in his closed carriage (which still needed paint) at the entrance to the station, but he got out and advanced to grasp George's hand tremulously, when the latter appeared, "Poor fellow!" he said, and patted him repeatedly upon the shoulder. "Poor fellow! Poor Georgie!"

George had not yet come to a full realization of his loss: so far, his condition was merely dazed; and as the Major continued to pat him, murmuring "Poor fellow!" over and over,

George was seized by an almost irresistible impulse to tell his grandfather that he was not a poodle. But he said "Thanks," in a low voice, and got into the carriage, his two relatives following with deferential sympathy. He noticed that the Major's tremulousness did not disappear, as they drove up the street, and that he seemed much feebler than during the summer. Principally, however, George was concerned with his own emotion, or rather, with his lack of emotion; and the anxious sympathy of his grandfather and his uncle made him feel hypocritical. He was not grief-stricken; but he felt that he ought to be, and, with a secret shame, concealed his callousness beneath an affectation of solemnity.

But when he was taken into the room where lay what was left of Wilbur Minafer, George had no longer to pretend; his grief was sufficient. It needed only the sight of that forever inert semblance of the quiet man who had been always so quiet a part of his son's life—so quiet a part that George had seldom been consciously aware that his father was indeed a part of his life. As the figure lay there, its very quietness was what was most lifelike; and suddenly it struck George hard. And in that unexpected, racking grief of his son, Wilbur Minafer became more vividly George's father than he had ever been in life.

When George left the room, his arm was about his black-robed mother, his shoulders were still shaken with sobs. He leaned upon his mother; she gently comforted him; and presently he recovered his composure and became self-conscious enough to wonder if he had not been making an unmanly display of himself. "I'm all right again, mother," he said awkwardly. "Don't worry about me: you'd better go lie down, or something; you look pretty pale."

Isabel did look pretty pale, but not ghastly pale, as Fanny did. Fanny's grief was overwhelming; she stayed in her room, and George did not see her until the next day, a few minutes before the funeral, when her haggard face appalled him. But by this time he was quite himself again, and during the short service in the cemetery his thoughts even wandered so far as

to permit him a feeling of regret not directly connected with his father. Beyond the open flower-walled grave was a mound where new grass grew; and here lay his great-uncle, old John Minafer, who had died the previous autumn; and beyond this were the graves of George's grandfather and grandmother Minafer, and of his grandfather Minafer's second wife, and her three sons, George's half-uncles, who had been drowned together in a canoe accident when George was a child—Fanny was the last of the family. Next beyond was the Amberson family lot, where lay the Major's wife and their sons Henry and Milton, uncles whom George dimly remembered; and beside them lay Isabel's older sister, his Aunt Estelle, who had died in her girlhood, long before George was born. The Minafer monument was a granite block, with the name chiselled upon its one polished side, and the Amberson monument was a white marble shaft, taller than any other in that neighbourhood. But farther on there was a newer section of the cemetery, an addition which had been thrown open to occupancy only a few years before, after dexterous modern treatment by a landscape specialist. There were some large new mausoleums here, and shafts taller than the Ambersons', as well as a number of monuments of some sculptural pretentiousness; and altogether the new section appeared to be a more fashionable and important quarter than that older one which contained the Amberson and Minafer lots. This was what caused George's regret, during the moment or two when his mind strayed from his father and the reading of the service.

. . . On the train, going back to college, ten days later, this regret (though it was as much an annoyance as a regret) recurred to his mind, and a feeling developed within him that the new quarter of the cemetery was in bad taste—not architecturally or sculpturally perhaps, but in presumption: it seemed to flaunt a kind of parvenu ignorance, as if it were actually pleased to be unaware that all the aristocratic and really important families were buried in the old section.

The annoyance gave way before a recollection of the sweet

mournfulness of his mother's face, as she had said good-bye to him at the station, and of how lovely she looked in her mourning. He thought of Lucy, whom he had seen only twice, and he could not help feeling that in these quiet interviews he had appeared to her as tinged with heroism—she had shown, rather than said, how brave she thought him in his sorrow. But what came most vividly to George's mind, during these retrospections, was the despairing face of his Aunt Fanny. Again and again he thought of it; he could not avoid its haunting. And for days, after he got back to college, the stricken likeness of Fanny would appear before him unexpectedly, and without a cause that he could trace in his immediately previous thoughts. Her grief had been so silent, yet it had so amazed him.

George felt more and more compassion for this ancient antagonist of his, and he wrote to his mother about her:

I'm afraid poor Aunt Fanny might think now father's gone we won't want her to live with us any longer and because I always teased her so much she might think I'd be for turning her out. I don't know where on earth she'd go or what she could live on if we did do something like this, and of course we never would do such a thing, but I'm pretty sure she had something of the kind on her mind. She didn't say anything, but the way she looked is what makes me think so. Honestly, to me she looked just scared sick. You tell her there isn't any danger in the world of my treating her like that. Tell her everything is to go on just as it always has. Tell her to cheer up!

CHAPTER XV

ISABEL did more for Fanny than telling her to cheer up. Everything that Fanny inherited from her father, old Aleck Minafer, had been invested in Wilbur's business; and Wilbur's business, after a period of illness corresponding in dates to the illness of Wilbur's body, had died just before Wilbur did. George Amberson and Fanny were both "wiped out to a miracle of precision," as Amberson said. They "owned not a penny and owed not a penny," he continued, explaining his phrase. "It's like the moment just before drowning: you're not under water and you're not out of it. All you know is that you're not dead yet."

He spoke philosophically, having his "prospects" from his father to fall back upon; but Fanny had neither "prospects" nor philosophy. However, a legal survey of Wilbur's estate revealed the fact that his life insurance was left clear of the wreck; and Isabel, with the cheerful consent of her son, promptly turned this salvage over to her sister-in-law. Invested, it would yield something better than nine hundred dollars a year, and thus she was assured of becoming neither a pauper nor a dependent, but proved to be, as Amberson said, adding his efforts to the cheering up of Fanny, "an heiress, after all, in spite of rolling mills and the devil." She was unable to smile, and he continued his humane gayeties. "See what a wonderfully desirable income nine hundred dollars is, Fanny: a bachelor, to be in your class, must have exactly forty-nine thousand one hundred a year. Then, you see, all you need to do, in order to have fifty thousand a year, is to be a little encouraging when some bachelor in your class begins to show by his haberdashery what he wants you to think about him!"

She looked at him wanly, murmured a desolate response—

she had "sewing to do"—and left the room; while Amberson shook his head ruefully at his sister. "I've often thought that humour was not my forte," he sighed. "Lord! She doesn't 'cheer up' much!"

The collegian did not return to his home for the holidays. Instead, Isabel joined him, and they went South for the two weeks. She was proud of her stalwart, good-looking son at the hotel where they stayed, and it was meat and drink to her when she saw how people stared at him in the lobby and on the big verandas—indeed, her vanity in him was so dominant that she was unaware of their staring at her with more interest and an admiration friendlier than George evoked. Happy to have him to herself for this fortnight, she loved to walk with him, leaning upon his arm, to read with him, to watch the sea with him—perhaps most of all she liked to enter the big dining-room with him.

Yet both of them felt constantly the difference between this Christmastime and other Christmastimes of theirs—in all, it was a sorrowful holiday. But when Isabel came East for George's commencement, in June, she brought Lucy with her —and things began to seem different, especially when George Amberson arrived with Lucy's father on Class Day. Eugene had been in New York, on business; Amberson easily persuaded him to this outing; and they made a cheerful party of it, with the new graduate of course the hero and centre of it all.

His uncle was a fellow alumnus. "Yonder was where I roomed when I was here," he said, pointing out one of the university buildings to Eugene. "I don't know whether George would let my admirers place a tablet to mark the spot, or not. He owns all these buildings now, you know."

"Didn't you, when you were here? Like uncle, like nephew."

"Don't tell George you think he's like me. Just at this time we should be careful of the young gentleman's feelings."

"Yes," said Eugene. "If we weren't he mightn't let us exist at all."

"I'm sure I didn't have it so badly at his age," Amberson said reflectively, as they strolled on through the commencement crowd. "For one thing, I had brothers and sisters, and my mother didn't just sit at my feet as George's does; and I wasn't an only grandchild, either. Father's always spoiled Georgie a lot more than he did any of his own children."

Eugene laughed. "You need only three things to explain all that's good and bad about Georgie."

"Three?"

"He's Isabel's only child. He's an Amberson. He's a boy."

"Well, Mister Bones, of these three things which are the good ones and which are the bad ones?"

"All of them," said Eugene.

It happened that just then they came in sight of the subject of their discourse. George was walking under the elms with Lucy, swinging a stick and pointing out to her various objects and localities which had attained historical value during the last four years. The two older men marked his gestures, careless and graceful; they observed his attitude, unconsciously noble, his easy proprietorship of the ground beneath his feet and round about, of the branches overhead, of the old buildings beyond, and of Lucy.

"I don't know," Eugene said, smiling whimsically. "I don't know. When I spoke of his being a human being—I don't know. Perhaps it's more like deity."

"I wonder if I *was* like that!" Amberson groaned. "You don't suppose every Amberson has had to go through it, do you?"

"Don't worry! At least half of it is a combination of youth, good looks, and college; and even the noblest Ambersons get over their nobility and come to be people in time. It takes more than time, though."

"I should say it *did* take more than time!" his friend agreed, shaking a rueful head.

Then they walked over to join the loveliest Amberson, whom neither time nor trouble seemed to have touched. She stood alone, thoughtful under the great trees, chaperoning

George and Lucy at a distance; but, seeing the two friends approaching, she came to meet them.

"It's charming, isn't it!" she said, moving her black-gloved hand to indicate the summery dressed crowd strolling about them, or clustering in groups, each with its own hero. "They seem so eager and so confident, all these boys—it's touching. But of course youth doesn't know it's touching."

Amberson coughed. "No, it doesn't seem to take itself as pathetic, precisely! Eugene and I were just speaking of something like that. Do you know what I think whenever I see these smooth, triumphal young faces? I always think: '*Oh*, how you're going to catch it'!"

"George!"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Life's most ingenious: it's got a special walloping for every mother's son of 'em!"

"Maybe," said Isabel, troubled—"maybe some of the mothers can take the walloping for them."

"Not one!" her brother assured her, with emphasis. "Not any more than she can take on her own face the lines that are bound to come on her son's. I suppose you know that all these young faces have got to get lines on 'em?"

"Maybe they won't," she said, smiling wistfully. "Maybe times will change, and nobody will have to wear lines."

"Times have changed like that for only one person that I know," Eugene said. And as Isabel looked inquiring, he laughed, and she saw that she was the "only one person." His implication was justified, moreover, and she knew it. She blushed charmingly.

"Which is it puts the lines on the faces?" Amberson asked. "Is it age or trouble? Of course we can't decide that wisdom does it—we must be polite to Isabel."

"I'll tell you what puts the lines there," Eugene said. "Age puts some, and trouble puts some, and work puts some, but the deepest are carved by lack of faith. The serenest brow is the one that believes the most."

"In what?" Isabel asked gently.

"In everything!"

She looked at him inquiringly, and he laughed as he had a moment before, when she looked at him that way. "Oh, yes, you do!" he said.

She continued to look at him inquiringly a moment or two longer, and there was an unconscious earnestness in her glance, something trustful as well as inquiring, as if she knew that whatever he meant it was all right. Then her eyes drooped thoughtfully, and she seemed to address some inquiries to herself. She looked up suddenly. "Why, I believe," she said, in a tone of surprise, "I believe I do!"

And at that both men laughed. "Isabel!" her brother exclaimed. "You're a foolish person! There are times when you look exactly fourteen years old!"

But this reminded her of her real affair in that part of the world. "Good gracious!" she said. "Where have the children got to? We must take Lucy pretty soon, so that George can go and sit with the Class. We must catch up with them."

She took her brother's arm, and the three moved on, looking about them in the crowd.

"Curious," Amberson remarked, as they did not immediately discover the young people they sought. "Even in such a concourse one would think we couldn't fail to see the proprietor."

"Several hundred proprietors to-day," Eugene suggested.

"No; they're only proprietors of the university," said George's uncle. "We're looking for the proprietor of the universe."

"There he is!" cried Isabel fondly, not minding this satire at all. "And doesn't he look it!"

Her escorts were still laughing at her when they joined the proprietor of the universe and his pretty friend, and though both Amberson and Eugene declined to explain the cause of their mirth, even upon Lucy's urgent request, the portents of the day were amiable, and the five made a happy party—that is to say, four of them made a happy audience for the fifth, and the mood of this fifth was gracious and cheerful.

George took no conspicuous part in either the academic or

the social celebrations of his class; he seemed to regard both sets of exercises with a tolerant amusement, his own "crowd" "not going in much for either of those sorts of things," as he explained to Lucy. What his crowd had gone in for remained ambiguous; some negligent testimony indicating that, except for an astonishing reliability which they all seemed to have attained in matters relating to musical comedy, they had not gone in for anything. Certainly the question one of them put to Lucy, in response to investigations of hers, seemed to point that way: "Don't you think," he said, "really, don't you think that being things is rather better than doing things?"

He said "rahthuh bettuh" for "rather better," and seemed to do it deliberately, with perfect knowledge of what he was doing. Later, Lucy mocked him to George, and George refused to smile; he somewhat inclined to such pronunciations, himself. This inclination was one of the things that he had acquired in the four years.

What else he had acquired, it might have puzzled him to state, had anybody asked him and required a direct reply within a reasonable space of time. He had learned how to pass examinations by "cramming"; that is, in three or four days and nights he could get into his head enough of a selected fragment of some scientific or philosophical or literary or linguistic subject to reply plausibly to six questions out of ten. He could retain the information necessary for such a feat just long enough to give a successful performance; then it would evaporate utterly from his brain, and leave him undisturbed. George, like his "crowd," not only preferred "being things" to "doing things," but had contented himself with four years of "being things" as a preparation for going on "being things." And when Lucy rather shyly pressed him for his friend's probable definition of the "things" it seemed so superior and beautiful to be, George raised his eyebrows slightly, meaning that she should have understood without explanation; but he did explain: "Oh, family and all that—being a gentleman, I suppose."

Lucy gave the horizon a long look, but offered no comment.

CHAPTER XVI

"AUNT FANNY doesn't look much better," George said to his mother, a few minutes after their arrival, on the night they got home. He stood with a towel in her doorway, concluding some sketchy ablutions before going downstairs to a supper which Fanny was hastily preparing for them. Isabel had not telegraphed; Fanny was taken by surprise when they drove up in a station cab at eleven o'clock; and George instantly demanded "a little decent food." (Some criticisms of his had publicly disturbed the composure of the dining-car steward four hours previously.) "I never saw anybody take things so hard as she seems to," he observed, his voice muffled by the towel. "Doesn't she get over it at all? I thought she'd feel better when we turned over the insurance to her—gave it to her absolutely, without any strings to it. She looks about a thousand years old!"

"She looks quite girlish, sometimes, though," his mother said.

"Has she looked that way much since father——"

"Not so much," Isabel said thoughtfully. "But she will, as time goes on."

"Time'll have to hurry, then, it seems to me," George observed, returning to his own room.

When they went down to the dining-room, he pronounced acceptable the salmon salad, cold beef, cheese, and cake which Fanny made ready for them without disturbing the servants. The journey had fatigued Isabel, she ate nothing, but sat to observe with tired pleasure the manifestations of her son's appetite, meanwhile giving her sister-in-law a brief summary of the events of commencement. But presently she kissed them both good-night—taking care to kiss George lightly

upon the side of his head, so as not to disturb his eating—and left aunt and nephew alone together.

"It never was becoming to her to look pale," Fanny said absently, a few moments after Isabel's departure.

"Wha'd you say, Aunt Fanny?"

"Nothing. I suppose your mother's been being pretty gay? Going a lot?"

"How could she?" George asked cheerfully. "In mourning, of course all she could do was just sit around and look on. That's all Lucy could do either, for the matter of that."

"I suppose so," his aunt assented. "How did Lucy get home?"

George regarded her with astonishment. "Why, on the train with the rest of us, of course."

"I didn't mean that," Fanny explained. "I meant from the station. Did you drive out to their house with her before you came here?"

"No. She drove home with her father, of course."

"Oh, I see. So Eugene came to the station to meet you."

"'To meet us?'" George echoed, renewing his attack upon the salmon salad. "How could he?"

"I don't know what you mean," Fanny said drearily, in the desolate voice that had become her habit. "I haven't seen him while your mother's been away."

"Naturally," said George. "He's been East himself."

At this Fanny's drooping eyelids opened wide.

"Did you *see* him?"

"Well, naturally, since he made the trip home with us!"

"He did?" she said sharply. "He's been with you all the time?"

"No; only on the train and the last three days before we left. Uncle George got him to come."

Fanny's eyelids drooped again, and she sat silent until George pushed back his chair and lit a cigarette, declaring his satisfaction with what she had provided. "You're a fine house-

keeper," he said benevolently. "You know how to make things look dainty as well as taste the right way. I don't believe you'd stay single very long if some of the bachelors and widowers around town could just once see——"

She did not hear him. "It's a little odd," she said.

"What's odd?"

"Your mother's not mentioning that Mr. Morgan had been with you."

"Didn't think of it, I suppose," said George carelessly; and, his benevolent mood increasing, he conceived the idea that a little harmless rallying might serve to elevate his aunt's drooping spirits. "I'll tell you something, in confidence," he said solemnly.

She looked up, startled. "What?"

"Well, it struck me that Mr. Morgan was looking pretty absent-minded, most of the time; and he certainly is dressing better than he used to. Uncle George told me he heard that the automobile factory had been doing quite well—won a race, too! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if all the young fellow had been waiting for was to know he had an assured income before he proposed."

"What 'young fellow'?"

"This young fellow Morgan," laughed George. "Honestly, Aunt Fanny, I shouldn't be a bit surprised to have him request an interview with me any day, and declare that his intentions are honourable, and ask my permission to pay his addresses to you. What had I better tell him?"

Fanny burst into tears.

"Good heavens!" George cried. "I was only teasing. I didn't mean——"

"Let me alone," she said lifelessly; and, continuing to weep, rose and began to clear away the dishes.

"Please, Aunt Fanny——"

"Just let me alone."

George was distressed. "I didn't mean anything, Aunt Fanny! I didn't know you'd got so sensitive as all that."

"You'd better go up to bed," she said desolately, going on with her work and her weeping.

"Anyhow," he insisted, "do let these things wait. Let the servants 'tend to the table in the morning."

"No."

"But, why not?"

"Just let me alone."

"Oh, Lord!" George groaned, going to the door. There he turned. "See here, Aunt Fanny, there's not a bit of use your bothering about those dishes to-night. What's the use of a butler and three maids if——"

"Just let me alone."

He obeyed, and could still hear a pathetic sniffing from the dining-room as he went up the stairs.

"By George!" he grunted, as he reached his own room; and his thought was that living with a person so sensitive to kindly raillery might prove lugubrious. He whistled, long and low, then went to the window and looked through the darkness to the great silhouette of his grandfather's house. Lights were burning over there, upstairs; probably his newly arrived uncle was engaged in talk with the Major.

George's glance lowered, resting casually upon the indistinct ground, and he beheld some vague shapes, unfamiliar to him. Formless heaps, they seemed; but, without much curiosity, he supposed that sewer connections or water pipes might be out of order, making necessary some excavations. He hoped the work would not take long; he hated to see that sweep of lawn made unsightly by trenches and lines of dirt, even temporarily. Not greatly disturbed, however, he pulled down the shade, yawned, and began to undress, leaving further investigation for the morning.

But in the morning he had forgotten all about it, and raised his shade, to let in the light, without even glancing toward the ground. Not until he had finished dressing did he look forth from his window, and then his glance was casual. The next instant his attitude became electric, and he gave utterance to a bellow of dismay. He ran from his room, plunged

down the stairs, out of the front door, and, upon a nearer view of the destroyed lawn, began to release profanity upon the breezeless summer air, which remained unaffected. Between his mother's house and his grandfather's, excavations for the cellars of five new houses were in process, each within a few feet of its neighbour. Foundations of brick were being laid; everywhere were piles of brick and stacked lumber, and sand heaps and mortar beds.

It was Sunday, and so the workmen implicated in these defacings were denied what unquestionably they would have considered a treat; but as the fanatic orator continued the monologue, a gentleman in flannels emerged upward from one of the excavations, and regarded him contemplatively.

"Obtaining any relief, nephew?" he inquired with some interest. "You must have learned quite a number of those expressions in childhood—it's so long since I'd heard them I fancied they were obsolete."

"Who wouldn't swear?" George demanded hotly. "In the name of God, what does grandfather mean, doing such things?"

"My private opinion is," said Amberson gravely, "he desires to increase his income by building these houses to rent."

"Well, in the name of God, can't he increase his income any other way but this?"

"In the name of God, it would appear he couldn't."

"It's beastly! It's a damn degradation! It's a crime!"

"I don't know about its being a crime," said his uncle, stepping over some planks to join him. "It might be a mistake, though. Your mother said not to tell you until we got home, so as not to spoil commencement for you. She rather feared you'd be upset."

"Upset! Oh, my Lord, I should think I *would* be upset! He's in his second childhood. What did you let him *do* it for, in the name of——"

"Make it in the name of heaven this time, George; it's Sunday. Well, I thought, myself, it was a mistake."

"I should say so!"

"Yes," said Amberson. "I wanted him to put up an apartment building instead of these houses."

"An apartment building! *Here?*"

"Yes; that was my idea."

George struck his hands together despairingly. "An apartment house! Oh, my Lord!"

"Don't worry! Your grandfather wouldn't listen to me, but he'll wish he had, some day. He says that people aren't going to live in miserable little flats when they can get a whole house with some grass in front and plenty of backyard behind. He sticks it out that apartment houses will never do in a town of this type, and when I pointed out to him that a dozen or so of 'em already *are* doing, he claimed it was just the novelty, and that they'd all be empty as soon as people got used to 'em. So he's putting up these houses."

"Is he getting miserly in his old age?"

"Hardly! Look what he gave Sydney and Amelia!"

"I don't mean he's a miser, of course," said George. "Heaven knows he's liberal enough with mother and me; but why on earth didn't he *sell* something or other rather than do a thing like this?"

"As a matter of fact," Amberson returned coolly, "I believe he *has* sold something or other, from time to time."

"Well, in heaven's name," George cried, "what did he do it for?"

"To get money," his uncle mildly replied. "That's my deduction."

"I suppose you're joking—or trying to!"

"That's the best way to look at it," Amberson said amiably. "Take the whole thing as a joke—and in the meantime, if you haven't had your breakfast——"

"I haven't!"

"Then if I were you I'd go in and get some. And" —he paused, becoming serious—"and if I were you I wouldn't say anything to your grandfather about this."

"I don't think I could trust myself to speak to him about it," said George. "I want to treat him respectfully, because he

is my grandfather, but I don't believe I could if I talked to him about such a thing as this!"

And with a gesture of despair, plainly signifying that all too soon after leaving bright college years behind him he had entered into the full tragedy of life, George turned bitterly upon his heel and went into the house for his breakfast.

His uncle, with his head whimsically upon one side, gazed after him not altogether unsympathetically, then descended again into the excavation whence he had lately emerged. Being a philosopher he was not surprised, that afternoon, in the course of a drive he took in the old carriage with the Major, when George was encountered upon the highway, flashing along in his runabout with Lucy beside him and Pendennis doing better than three minutes.

"He seems to have recovered," Amberson remarked. "Looks in the highest good spirits."

"I beg your pardon."

"Your grandson," Amberson explained. "He was inclined to melancholy this morning, but seemed jolly enough just now when they passed us."

"What was he melancholy about? Not getting remorseful about all the money he's spent at college, was he?" The Major chuckled feebly, but with sufficient grimness. "I wonder what he thinks I'm made of," he concluded querulously.

"Gold," his son suggested, adding gently, "And he's right about part of you, father."

"What part?"

"Your heart."

The Major laughed ruefully. "I suppose that may account for how heavy it feels, sometimes, nowadays. This town seems to be rolling right over that old heart you mentioned, George—rolling over it and burying it under! When I think of those devilish workmen digging up my lawn, yelling around my house——"

"Never mind, father. Don't think of it. When things are a nuisance it's a good idea not to keep remembering 'em."

"I *try* not to," the old gentleman murmured. "I try to

keep remembering that I won't be remembering anything very long." And, somehow convinced that this thought was a mirthful one, he laughed loudly, and slapped his knee. "Not so very long now, my boy!" he chuckled, continuing to echo his own amusement. "Not so very long. Not so very long!"

CHAPTER XVII

YOUNG George paid his respects to his grandfather the following morning, having been occupied with various affairs and engagements on Sunday until after the Major's bedtime; and topics concerned with building or excavations were not introduced into the conversation, which was a cheerful one until George lightly mentioned some new plans of his. He was a skilful driver, as the Major knew, and he spoke of his desire to extend his proficiency in this art: in fact, he entertained the ambition to drive a four-in-hand. However, as the Major said nothing, and merely sat still, looking surprised, George went on to say that he did not propose to "go in for coaching just at the start"; he thought it would be better to begin with a tandem. He was sure Pendennis could be trained to work as a leader; and all that one needed to buy at present, he said, would be "comparatively inexpensive—a new trap, and the harness, of course, and a good bay to match Pendennis." He did not care for a special groom; one of the stablemen would do.

At this point the Major decided to speak. "You say one of the stablemen would do?" he inquired, his widened eyes remaining fixed upon his grandson. "That's lucky, because one's all there is, just at present, George. Old fat Tom does it all. Didn't you notice, when you took Pendennis out, yesterday?"

"Oh, that will be all right, sir. My mother can lend me her man."

"Can she?" The old gentleman smiled faintly. "I wonder——" He paused.

"What, sir?"

"Whether you mightn't care to go to law-school somewhere perhaps. I'd be glad to set aside a sum that would see you through."

This senile divergence from the topic in hand surprised George painfully. "I have no interest whatever in the law," he said. "I don't care for it, and the idea of being a professional man has never appealed to me. None of the family has ever gone in for that sort of thing, to my knowledge, and I don't care to be the first. I was speaking of driving a tandem——"

"I know you were," the Major said quietly.

George looked hurt. "I beg your pardon. Of course if the idea doesn't appeal to you——" And he rose to go.

The Major ran a tremulous hand through his hair, sighing deeply. "I—I don't like to refuse you anything, Georgie," he said. "I don't know that I often have refused you whatever you wanted—in reason——"

"You've always been more than generous, sir," George interrupted quickly. "And if the idea of a tandem doesn't appeal to you, why—of course——" And he waved his hand, heroically dismissing the tandem.

The Major's distress became obvious. "Georgie, I'd like to, but—but I've an idea tandems are dangerous to drive, and your mother might be anxious. She——"

"No, sir; I think not. She felt it would be rather a good thing—help to keep me out in the open air. But if perhaps your finances——"

"Oh, it isn't that so much," the old gentleman said hurriedly. "I wasn't thinking of that altogether." He laughed uncomfortably. "I guess we could still afford a new horse or two, if need be——"

"I thought you said——"

The Major waved his hand airily. "Oh, a few retrenchments where things were useless: nothing gained by a raft of idle darkies in the stable—nor by a lot of extra land that might as well be put to work for us in rentals. And if you want this thing so very much——"

"It's not important enough to bother about, really, of course."

"Well, let's wait till autumn then," said the Major in a

tone of relief. "We'll see about it in the autumn, if you're still in the mind for it then. That will be a great deal better. You remind me of it, along in September—or October. We'll see what can be done." He rubbed his hands cheerfully. "We'll see what can be done about it then, Georgie. We'll see."

And George, in reporting this conversation to his mother, was ruefully humorous. "In fact, the old boy cheered up so much," he told her, "you'd have thought he'd got a real load off his mind. He seemed to think he'd fixed *me* up perfectly, and that I was just as good as driving a tandem around his library right that minute! Of course I know he's anything but miserly; still I can't help thinking he must be salting a lot of money away. I know prices are higher than they used to be, but he doesn't spend within thousands of what he used to, and *we* certainly can't be spending more than we always have spent. Where does it all go to? Uncle George told me grandfather had sold some pieces of property, and it looks a little queer. If he's really 'property poor,' of course we ought to be more saving than we are, and help him out. *I* don't mind giving up a tandem if it seems a little too expensive just now. I'm perfectly willing to live quietly till he gets his bank balance where he wants it. But I have a faint suspicion, not that he's getting miserly—not that at all—but that old age has begun to make him timid about money. There's no doubt about it, he's getting a little queer: he can't keep his mind on a subject long. Right in the middle of talking about one thing he'll wander off to something else; and I shouldn't be surprised if he turned out to be a lot better off than any of us guess. It's entirely possible that whatever he's sold just went into government bonds, or even his safety deposit box. There was a friend of mine in college had an old uncle like that: made the whole family think he was poor as dirt—and then left seven millions. People get terribly queer as they get old, sometimes, and grandfather certainly doesn't act the way he used to. He seems to be a totally different man. For instance, he said he thought tandem driving might be dangerous——"

"Did he?" Isabel asked quickly. "Then I'm glad he doesn't want you to have one. I didn't dream——"

"But it's not. There isn't the slightest——"

Isabel had a bright idea. "Georgie! Instead of a tandem wouldn't it interest you to get one of Eugene's automobiles?"

"I don't think so. They're fast enough, of course. In fact, running one of those things is getting to be quite on the cards for sport, and people go all over the country in 'em. But they're dirty things, and they keep getting out of order, so that you're always lying down on your back in the mud, and——"

"Oh, no," she interrupted eagerly. "Haven't you noticed? You don't see nearly so many people doing that nowadays as you did two or three years ago, and, when you do, Eugene says it's apt to be one of the older patterns. The way they make them now, you can get at most of the machinery from the top. I do think you'd be interested, dear."

George remained indifferent. "Possibly—but I hardly think so. I know a lot of good people are really taking them up, but still——"

"'But still' what?" she said as he paused.

"But still—well, I suppose I'm a little old-fashioned and fastidious, but I'm afraid being a sort of engine driver never will appeal to me, mother. It's exciting, and I'd like that part of it, but still it doesn't seem to me precisely the thing a gentleman ought to do. Too much overalls and monkey-wrenches and grease!"

"But Eugene says people are hiring mechanics to do all that sort of thing for them. They're beginning to have them just the way they have coachmen; and he says it's developing into quite a profession."

"I know that, mother, of course; but I've seen some of these mechanics, and they're not very satisfactory. For one thing, most of them only pretend to understand the machinery and they let people break down a hundred miles from nowhere, so that about all these fellows are good for is to hunt up a farmer and hire a horse to pull the automobile. And

friends of mine at college that've had a good deal of experience tell me the mechanics who do understand the engines have no training at all as servants. They're awful! They say anything they like, and usually speak to members of the family as 'Say!' No, I believe I'd rather wait for September and a tandem, mother."

Nevertheless, George sometimes consented to sit in an automobile, while waiting for September, and he frequently went driving in one of Eugene's cars with Lucy and her father. He even allowed himself to be escorted with his mother and Fanny through the growing factory, which was now, as the foreman of the paint shop informed the visitors, "turning out a car and a quarter a day." George had seldom been more excessively bored, but his mother showed a lively interest in everything, wishing to have all the machinery explained to her. It was Lucy who did most of the explaining, while her father looked on and laughed at the mistakes she made, and Fanny remained in the background with George, exhibiting a bleakness that over-matched his boredom.

From the factory Eugene took them to lunch at a new restaurant, just opened in the town, a place which surprised Isabel with its metropolitan air, and, though George made fun of it to her, in a whisper, she offered everything the tribute of pleased exclamations; and her gayety helped Eugene's to make the little occasion almost a festive one.

George's ennui disappeared in spite of himself, and he laughed to see his mother in such spirits. "I didn't know mineral waters could go to a person's head," he said. "Or perhaps it's this place. It might pay to have a new restaurant opened somewhere in town every time you get the blues."

Fanny turned to him with a wan smile. "Oh, *she* doesn't 'get the blues,' George!" Then she added, as if fearing her remark might be thought unpleasantly significant, "I never knew a person of a more even disposition. I wish I could be like that!" And though the tone of this afterthought was not so enthusiastic as she tried to make it, she succeeded in producing a fairly amiable effect.

"No," Isabel said, reverting to George's remark, and overlooking Fanny's. "What makes me laugh so much at nothing is Eugene's factory. Wouldn't anybody be delighted to see an old friend take an idea out of the air like that—an idea that most people laughed at him for—wouldn't any old friend of his be happy to see how he'd made his idea into such a splendid, humming thing as that factory—all shiny steel, clicking and buzzing away, and with all those workmen, such *muscled* looking men and yet so intelligent looking?"

"Hear! Hear!" George applauded. "We seem to have a lady orator among us. I hope the waiters won't mind."

Isabel laughed, not discouraged. "It's beautiful to see such a thing," she said. "It makes us all happy, dear old Eugene!"

And with a brave gesture she stretched out her hand to him across the small table. He took it quickly, giving her a look in which his laughter tried to remain, but vanished before a gratitude threatening to become emotional in spite of him. Isabel, however, turned instantly to Fanny. "Give him your hand, Fanny," she said gayly; and, as Fanny mechanically obeyed, "There!" Isabel cried. "If brother George were here, Eugene would have his three oldest and best friends congratulating him all at once. We know what brother George thinks about it, though. It's just beautiful, Eugene!"

Probably if her brother George had been with them at the little table, he would have made known what he thought about herself, for it must inevitably have struck him that she was in the midst of one of those "times" when she looked "exactly fourteen years old." Lucy served as a proxy for Amberson, perhaps, when she leaned toward George and whispered: "Did you *ever* see anything so lovely?"

"As what?" George inquired, not because he misunderstood, but because he wished to prolong the pleasant neighbourliness of whispering.

"As your mother! Think of her doing that! She's a darling! And papa"—here she imperfectly repressed a tendency to laugh—"papa looks as if he were either going to explode or utter loud sobs!"

Eugene commanded his features, however, and they resumed their customary apprehensiveness. "I used to write verse," he said—"if you remember——"

"Yes," Isabel interrupted gently. "I remember."

"I don't recall that I've written any for twenty years or so," he continued. "But I'm almost thinking I could do it again, to thank you for making a factory visit into such a kind celebration."

"Gracious!" Lucy whispered, giggling. "Aren't they sentimental!"

"People that age always are," George returned. "They get sentimental over anything at all. Factories or restaurants, it doesn't matter what!"

And both of them were seized with fits of laughter which they managed to cover under the general movement of departure, as Isabel had risen to go.

Outside, upon the crowded street, George helped Lucy into his runabout, and drove off, waving triumphantly, and laughing at Eugene who was struggling with the engine of his car, in the tonneau of which Isabel and Fanny had established themselves. "Looks like a hand-organ man grinding away for pennies," said George, as the runabout turned the corner and into National Avenue. "I'll still take a horse, any day."

He was not so cocksure, half an hour later, on an open road, when a siren whistle wailed behind him, and before the sound had died away, Eugene's car, coming from behind with what seemed fairly like one long leap, went by the runabout and dwindled almost instantaneously in perspective, with a lace handkerchief in a black-gloved hand fluttering sweet derision as it was swept onward into minuteness—a mere white speck —and then out of sight.

George was undoubtedly impressed. "Your father does know how to drive some," the dashing exhibition forced him to admit. "Of course Pendennis isn't as young as he was, and I don't care to push him too hard. I wouldn't mind handling one of those machines on the road like that, myself, if that was all there was to it—no cranking to do, or fooling with

the engine. Well, I enjoyed part of that lunch quite a lot, Lucy."

"The salad?"

"No. Your whispering to me."

"Blarney!"

George made no response, but checked Pendennis to a walk. Whereupon Lucy protested quickly: "Oh, don't!"

"Why? Do you want him to trot his legs off?"

"No, but——"

"'No, but'—what?"

She spoke with apparent gravity: "I know when you make him walk it's so you can give all your attention to—to proposing to me again!"

And as she turned a face of exaggerated colour to him, "By the Lord, but you're a little witch!" George cried.

"George, *do* let Pendennis trot again!"

"I won't!"

She clucked to the horse. "Get up, Pendennis! Trot! Go on! Commence!"

Pendennis paid no attention; she meant nothing to him, and George laughed at her fondly. "You *are* the prettiest thing in this world, Lucy!" he exclaimed. "When I see you in winter, in furs, with your cheeks red, I think you're prettiest then, but when I see you in summer, in a straw hat and a shirtwaist and a duck skirt and white gloves and those little silver-buckled slippers, and your rose-coloured parasol, and your cheeks not red but with a kind of pinky glow about them, then I see I must have been wrong about the winter! When are you going to drop the 'almost' and say we're really engaged?"

"Oh, not for *years!* So there's the answer, and let's trot again."

But George was persistent; moreover, he had become serious during the last minute or two. "I want to know," he said. "I really mean it."

"Let's don't be serious, George," she begged him hopefully. "Let's talk of something pleasant."

He was a little offended. "Then it isn't pleasant for you to know that I want to marry you?"

At this she became as serious as he could have asked; she looked down, and her lip quivered like that of a child about to cry. Suddenly she put her hand upon one of his for just an instant, and then withdrew it.

"Lucy!" he said huskily. "Dear, what's the matter? You look as if you were going to cry. You always do that," he went on plaintively, "whenever I can get you to talk about marrying me."

"I know it," she murmured.

"Well, why do you?"

Her eyelids flickered, and then she looked up at him with a sad gravity, tears seeming just at the poise. "One reason's because I have a feeling that it's never going to be."

"Why?"

"It's just a feeling."

"You haven't any reason or——"

"It's just a feeling."

"Well, if that's all," George said, reassured, and laughing confidently, "I guess I won't be very much troubled!" But at once he became serious again, adopting the tone of argument. "Lucy, how is anything ever going to get a *chance* to come of it, so long as you keep sticking to 'almost'? Doesn't it strike you as unreasonable to have a 'feeling' that we'll never be married, when what principally stands between us is the fact that you won't be really engaged to me? That does seem pretty absurd! Don't you *care* enough about me to marry me?"

She looked down again, pathetically troubled. "Yes."

"Won't you always care that much about me?"

"I'm—yes—I'm afraid so, George. I never do change much about anything."

"Well, then, why in the world won't you drop the 'almost'?"

Her distress increased. "Everything is—everything——"

"What about 'everything'?"

"Everything is so—so unsettled."

And at that he uttered an exclamation of impatience. "If you aren't the queerest girl! *What* is 'unsettled'?"

"Well, for one thing," she said, able to smile at his vehemence, "you haven't settled on anything to do. At least, if you have you've never spoken of it."

As she spoke, she gave him the quickest possible side glance of hopeful scrutiny; then looked away, not happily. Surprise and displeasure were intentionally visible upon the countenance of her companion; and he permitted a significant period of silence to elapse before making any response. "Lucy," he said, finally, with cold dignity, "I should like to ask you a few questions."

"Yes?"

"The first is: Haven't you perfectly well understood that I don't mean to go into business or adopt a profession?"

"I wasn't quite sure," she said gently. "I really didn't know—quite."

"Then of course it's time I did tell you. I never have been able to see any occasion for a man's going into trade, or being a lawyer, or any of those things if his position and family were such that he didn't need to. You know, yourself, there are a lot of people in the East—in the South, too, for that matter—that don't think we've got any particular family or position or culture in this part of the country. I've met plenty of that kind of provincial snobs myself, and they're pretty galling. There were one or two men in my crowd at college, their families had lived on their income for three generations, and they never dreamed there was anybody in their class out here. I had to show them a thing or two right at the start, and I guess they won't forget it! Well, I think it's time all their sort found out that three generations *can* mean just as much out here as anywhere else. That's the way I feel about it, and let me tell you I feel it pretty deeply!"

"But what *are* you going to do, George?" she cried.

George's earnestness surpassed hers; he had become flushed

and his breathing was emotional. As he confessed, with simple genuineness, he did feel what he was saying "pretty deeply"; and in truth his state approached the tremulous. "I expect to live an honourable life," he said. "I expect to contribute my share to charities, and to take part in—in movements."

"What kind?"

"Whatever appeals to me," he said.

Lucy looked at him with grieved wonder. "But you really don't mean to have any regular business or profession at *all?*"

"I certainly do not!" George returned promptly and emphatically.

"I was afraid so," she said in a low voice.

George continued to breathe deeply throughout another protracted interval of silence. Then he said, "I should like to revert to the questions I was asking you, if you don't mind."

"No, George. I think we'd better——"

"Your father is a business man——"

"He's a mechanical genius," Lucy interrupted quickly. "Of course he's both. And he was a lawyer once—he's done all sorts of things."

"Very well. I merely wished to ask if it's his influence that makes you think I ought to 'do' something?"

Lucy frowned slightly. "Why, I suppose almost everything I think or say must be owing to his influence in one way or another. We haven't had anybody but each other for so many years, and we always think about alike, so of course——"

"I see!" And George's brow darkened with resentment. "So that's it, is it? It's your father's idea that I ought to go into business and that you oughtn't to be engaged to me until I do."

Lucy gave a start, her denial was so quick. "No! I've never once spoken to him about it. Never!"

George looked at her keenly, and he jumped to a conclusion not far from the truth. "But you know without talking to him that it's the way he does feel about it? I see."

She nodded gravely. "Yes."

George's brow grew darker still. "Do you think I'd be much of a man," he said, slowly, "if I let any other man dictate to me my own way of life?"

"George! Who's 'dictating' your——"

"It seems to me it amounts to that!" he returned.

"Oh, *no!* I only know how papa thinks about things. He's never, never spoken unkindly, or 'dictatingly' of you." She lifted her hand in protest, and her face was so touching in its distress that for the moment George forgot his anger. He seized that small, troubled hand.

"Lucy," he said huskily. "Don't you know that I love you?"

"Yes—I do."

"Don't you love me?"

"Yes—I do."

"Then what does it matter what your father thinks about my doing something or not doing anything? He has his way, and I have mine. I don't believe in the whole world scrubbing dishes and selling potatoes and trying law cases. Why, look at your father's best friend, my Uncle George Amberson—he's never done anything in his life, and——"

"Oh, yes, he has," she interrupted. "He was in politics."

"Well, I'm glad he's out," George said. "Politics is a dirty business for a gentleman, and Uncle George would tell you that himself. Lucy, let's not talk any more about it. Let me tell mother when I get home that we're engaged. Won't you, dear?"

She shook her head.

"Is it because——"

For a fleeting instant she touched to her cheek the hand that held hers. "No," she said, and gave him a sudden little look of renewed gayety. "Let's let it stay 'almost.'"

"Because your father——"

"Oh, because it's better!"

George's voice shook. "Isn't it your father?"

"It's his ideals I'm thinking of—yes."

George dropped her hand abruptly and anger narrowed his

eyes. "I know what you mean," he said. "I dare say I don't care for your father's ideals any more than he does for mine!"

He tightened the reins, Pendennis quickening eagerly to the trot; and when George jumped out of the runabout before Lucy's gate, and assisted her to descend, the silence in which they parted was the same that had begun when Pendennis began to trot.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT evening, after dinner, George sat with his mother and his Aunt Fanny upon the veranda. In former summers, when they sat outdoors in the evening, they had customarily used an open terrace at the side of the house, looking toward the Major's, but that more private retreat now afforded too blank and abrupt a view of the nearest of the new houses; so, without consultation, they had abandoned it for the Romanesque stone structure in front, an oppressive place.

Its oppression seemed congenial to George; he sat upon the copestone of the stone parapet, his back against a stone pilaster; his attitude not comfortable, but rigid, and his silence not comfortable, either, but heavy. However, to the eyes of his mother and his aunt, who occupied wicker chairs at a little distance, he was almost indistinguishable except for the stiff white shield of his evening frontage.

"It's so nice of you always to dress in the evening, Georgie," his mother said, her glance resting upon this surface. "Your Uncle George always used to, and so did father, for years; but they both stopped quite a long time ago. Unless there's some special occasion, it seems to me we don't see it done any more, except on the stage and in the magazines."

He made no response, and Isabel, after waiting a little while, as if she expected one, appeared to acquiesce in his mood for silence, and turned her head to gaze thoughtfully out at the street.

There, in the highway, the evening life of the Midland city had begun. A rising moon was bright upon the tops of the shade trees, where their branches met overhead, arching across the street, but only filtered splashings of moonlight reached the block pavement below; and through this darkness flashed the firefly lights of silent bicycles gliding by in pairs

and trios—or sometimes a dozen at a time might come, and not so silent, striking their little bells; the riders' voices calling and laughing; while now and then a pair of invisible experts would pass, playing mandolin and guitar as if handle-bars were of no account in the world—their music would come swiftly, and then too swiftly die away. Surreys rumbled lightly by, with the plod-plod of honest old horses, and frequently there was the glitter of whizzing spokes from a runabout or a sporting buggy, and the sharp, decisive hoof-beats of a trotter. Then, like a cowboy shooting up a peaceful camp, a frantic devil would hurtle out of the distance, bellowing, exhaust racketing like a machine gun gone amuck—and at these horrid sounds the surreys and buggies would hug the curbstone, and the bicycles scatter to cover, cursing; while children rushed from the sidewalks to drag pet dogs from the street. The thing would roar by, leaving a long wake of turbulence; then the indignant street would quiet down for a few minutes—till another came.

"There are a great many more than there used to be," Miss Fanny observed, in her lifeless voice, as the lull fell after one of these visitations. "Eugene is right about that; there seem to be at least three or four times as many as there were last summer, and you never hear the ragamuffins shouting 'Get a horse!' nowadays; but I think he may be mistaken about their going on increasing after this. I don't believe we'll see so many next summer as we do now."

"Why?" asked Isabel.

"Because I've begun to agree with George about their being more a fad than anything else, and I think it must be the height of the fad just now. You know how roller-skating came in—everybody in the world seemed to be crowding to the rinks—and now only a few children use rollers for getting to school. Besides, people won't permit the automobiles to be used. Really, I think they'll make laws against them. You see how they spoil the bicycling and the driving; people just seem to hate them! They'll never stand it—never in the world! Of course I'd be sorry to see such a thing happen to Eugene,

but I shouldn't be really surprised to see a law passed forbidding the sale of automobiles, just the way there is with concealed weapons."

"Fanny!" exclaimed her sister-in-law. "You're not in earnest?"

"I am, though!"

Isabel's sweet-toned laugh came out of the dusk where she sat. "Then you didn't mean it when you told Eugene you'd enjoyed the drive this afternoon?"

"I didn't say it so very enthusiastically, did I?"

"Perhaps not, but he certainly thought he'd pleased you."

"I don't think I gave him any right to think he'd pleased me," Fanny said slowly.

"Why not? Why shouldn't you, Fanny?"

Fanny did not reply at once, and when she did, her voice was almost inaudible, but much more reproachful than plaintive. "I hardly think I'd want anyone to get the notion he'd pleased me just now. It hardly seems time, yet—to me."

Isabel made no response, and for a time the only sound upon the dark veranda was the creeking of the wicker rocking-chair in which Fanny sat—a creaking which seemed to denote content and placidity on the part of the chair's occupant, though at this juncture a series of human shrieks could have been little more eloquent of emotional disturbance. However, the creaking gave its hearer one great advantage: it could be ignored.

"Have you given up smoking, George?" Isabel asked presently.

"No."

"I hoped perhaps you had, because you've not smoked since dinner. We shan't mind if you care to."

"No, thanks."

There was silence again, except for the creaking of the rocking-chair; then a low, clear whistle, singularly musical, was heard softly rendering an old air from "Fra Diavolo." The creaking stopped.

"Is that you, George?" Fanny asked abruptly.

"Is that me what?"

"Whistling 'On Yonder Rock Reclining'?"

"It's I," said Isabel.

"Oh," Fanny said dryly.

"Does it disturb you?"

"Not at all. I had an idea George was depressed about something, and merely wondered if he could be making such a cheerful sound." And Fanny resumed her creaking.

"Is she right, George?" his mother asked quickly, leaning forward in her chair to peer at him through the dusk. "You didn't eat a very hearty dinner, but I thought it was probably because of the warm weather. Are you troubled about anything?"

"*No!*" he said angrily.

"That's good. I thought we had such a nice day, didn't you?"

"I suppose so," he muttered, and, satisfied, she leaned back in her chair; but "Fra Diavolo" was not revived. After a time she rose, went to the steps and stood for several minutes looking across the street. Then her laughter was faintly heard.

"Are you laughing about something?" Fanny inquired.

"Pardon?" Isabel did not turn, but continued her observation of what had interested her upon the opposite side of the street.

"I asked: Were you laughing at something?"

"Yes, I was!" And she laughed again. "It's that funny, fat old Mrs. Johnson. She has a habit of sitting at her bedroom window with a pair of opera-glasses."

"Really!"

"Really. You can see the window through the place that was left when we had the dead walnut tree cut down. She looks up and down the street, but mostly at father's and over here. Sometimes she forgets to put out the light in her room, and there she is, spying away for all the world to see!"

However, Fanny made no effort to observe this spectacle, but continued her creaking. "I've always thought her a very good woman," she said primly.

"So she is," Isabel agreed. "She's a good, friendly old thing, a little too intimate in her manner, sometimes, and if her poor old opera-glasses afford her the quiet happiness of knowing what sort of young man our new cook is walking out with, I'm the last to begrudge it to her! Don't you want to come and look at her, George?"

"What? I beg your pardon. I hadn't noticed what you were talking about."

"It's nothing," she laughed. "Only a funny old lady—and she's gone now. I'm going, too—at least, I'm going indoors to read. It's cooler in the house, but the heat's really not bad anywhere, since nightfall. Summer's dying. How quickly it goes, once it begins to die."

When she had gone into the house, Fanny stopped rocking, and, leaning forward, drew her black gauze wrap about her shoulders and shivered. "Isn't it queer," she said drearily, "how your mother can use such words?"

"What words are you talking about?" George asked.

"Words like 'die' and 'dying.' I don't see how she can bear to use them so soon after your poor father——" She shivered again.

"It's almost a year," George said absently, and he added: "It seems to me you're using them yourself."

"I? Never!"

"Yes, you did."

"When?"

"Just this minute."

"Oh!" said Fanny. "You mean when I repeated what *she* said? That's hardly the same thing, George."

He was not enough interested to argue the point. "I don't think you'll convince anybody that mother's unfeeling," he said indifferently.

"I'm not trying to convince anybody. I mean merely that in my opinion—well, perhaps it may be just as wise for me to keep my opinions to myself."

She paused expectantly, but her possible anticipation that George would urge her to discard wisdom and reveal her

opinion was not fulfilled. His back was toward her, and he occupied himself with opinions of his own about other matters. Fanny may have felt some disappointment as she rose to withdraw.

However, at the last moment she halted with her hand upon the latch of the screen door.

"There's *one* thing I hope," she said. "I hope at least she won't leave off her full mourning on the *very* anniversary of Wilbur's death!"

The light door clanged behind her, and the sound annoyed her nephew. He had no idea why she thus used inoffensive wood and wire to dramatize her departure from the veranda, the impression remaining with him being that she was critical of his mother upon some point of funeral millinery. Throughout the desultory conversation he had been profoundly concerned with his own disturbing affairs, and now was preoccupied with a dialogue taking place (in his mind) between himself and Miss Lucy Morgan. As he beheld the vision, Lucy had just thrown herself at his feet. "George, you *must* forgive me!" she cried. "Papa was utterly wrong! I have told him so, and the truth is that I have come to rather dislike him as you do, and as you always have, in your heart of hearts. George, I understand you: thy people shall be my people and thy gods my gods. George, won't you take me back?"

"Lucy, are you *sure* you understand me?" And in the darkness George's bodily lips moved in unison with those which uttered the words in his imaginary rendering of this scene. An eavesdropper, concealed behind the column, could have heard the whispered word "sure," the emphasis put upon it in the vision was so poignant. "You say you understand me, but are you *sure?*"

Weeping, her head bowed almost to her waist, the ethereal Lucy made reply: "*Oh*, so sure! I will never listen to father's opinions again. I do not even care if I never see him again!"

"Then I pardon you," he said gently.

This softened mood lasted for several moments—until he

realized that it had been brought about by processes strikingly lacking in substance. Abruptly he swung his feet down from the copestone to the floor of the veranda. "Pardon nothing!" No meek Lucy had thrown herself in remorse at his feet; and now he pictured her as she probably really was at this moment: sitting on the white steps of her own front porch in the moonlight, with red-headed Fred Kinney and silly Charlie Johnson and four or five others—all of them laughing, most likely, and some idiot playing the guitar!

George spoke aloud: "Riffraff!"

And because of an impish but all too natural reaction of the mind, he could see Lucy with much greater distinctness in this vision than in his former pleasing one. For a moment she was miraculously real before him, every line and colour of her. He saw the moonlight shimmering in the chiffon of her skirt, brightest on her crossed knee and the tip of her slipper; saw the blue curve of the characteristic shadow behind her, as she leaned back against the white step; saw the watery twinkling of sequins in the gauze wrap over her white shoulders as she moved, and the faint, symmetrical lights in her black hair—and not one alluring, exasperating twentieth-of-an-inch of her laughing profile was spared him as she seemed to turn to the infernal Kinney——

"Riffraff!" And George began furiously to pace the stone floor. "Riffraff!" By this hard term—a favourite with him since childhood's scornful hour—he meant to indicate, not Lucy, but the young gentlemen who, in his vision, surrounded her. "Riffraff!" he said again, aloud, and again:

"Riffraff!"

At that moment, as it happened, Lucy was playing chess with her father; and her heart, though not remorseful, was as heavy as George could have wished. But she did not let Eugene see that she was troubled, and he was pleased when he won three games of her. Usually she beat him.

CHAPTER XIX

GEORGE went driving the next afternoon alone, and, encountering Lucy and her father on the road, in one of Morgan's cars, lifted his hat, but nowise relaxed his formal countenance as they passed. Eugene waved a cordial hand quickly returned to the steering-wheel; but Lucy only nodded gravely and smiled no more than George did. Nor did she accompany Eugene to the Major's for dinner, the following Sunday evening, though both were bidden to attend that feast, which was already reduced in numbers and gayety by the absence of George Amberson. Eugene explained to his host that Lucy had gone away to visit a school-friend.

The information, delivered in the library, just before old Sam's appearance to announce dinner, set Miss Minafer in quite a flutter. "Why, George!" she said, turning to her nephew. "How does it happen you didn't tell us?" And with both hands opening, as if to express her innocence of some conspiracy, she exclaimed to the others, "He's never said one word to us about Lucy's planning to go away!"

"Probably afraid to," the Major suggested. "Didn't know but he might break down and cry if he tried to speak of it!" He clapped his grandson on the shoulder, inquiring jocularly, "That it, Georgie?"

Georgie made no reply, but he was red enough to justify the Major's developing a chuckle into laughter; though Miss Fanny, observing her nephew keenly, got an impression that this fiery blush was in truth more fiery than tender. She caught a glint in his eye less like confusion than resentment, and saw a dilation of his nostrils which might have indicated not so much a sweet agitation as an inaudible snort. Fanny had never been lacking in curiosity, and, since her brother's death, this quality was more than ever alert. The fact that George had spent all the evenings of the past week at home

had not been lost upon her, nor had she failed to ascertain, by diplomatic inquiries, that since the day of the visit to Eugene's shops George had gone driving alone.

At the dinner-table she continued to observe him, sidelong; and toward the conclusion of the meal she was not startled by an episode which brought discomfort to the others. After the arrival of coffee the Major was rallying Eugene upon some rival automobile shops lately built in a suburb, and already promising to flourish.

"I suppose they'll either drive you out of the business," said the old gentleman, "or else the two of you'll drive all the rest of us off the streets."

"If we do, we'll even things up by making the streets five or ten times as long as they are now," Eugene returned.

"How do you propose to do that?"

"It isn't the distance from the centre of a town that counts," said Eugene; "it's the time it takes to get there. This town's already spreading; bicycles and trolleys have been doing their share, but the automobile is going to carry city streets clear out to the county line."

The Major was skeptical. "Dream on, fair son!" he said. "It's lucky for us that you're only dreaming; because if people go to moving that far, real estate values in the old residence part of town are going to be stretched pretty thin."

"I'm afraid so," Eugene assented. "Unless you keep things so bright and clean that the old section will stay more attractive than the new ones."

"Not very likely! How are things going to be kept 'bright and clean' with soft coal and our kind of city government?"

"They aren't," Eugene replied quickly. "There's no hope of it, and already the boarding-house is marching up National Avenue. There are two in the next block below here, and there are a dozen in the half-mile below that. My relatives, the Sharons, have sold their house and are building in the country—at least, they call it 'the country.' It will be city in two or three years."

"Good gracious!" the Major exclaimed, affecting dismay.

"So your little shops are going to ruin all your old friends, Eugene!"

"Unless my old friends take warning in time, or abolish smoke and get a new kind of city government. I should say the best chance is to take warning."

"Well, well!" the Major laughed. "You have enough faith in miracles, Eugene—granting that trolleys and bicycles and automobiles are miracles. So you think they're to change the face of the land, do you?"

"They're already doing it, Major; and it can't be stopped. Automobiles——"

At this point he was interrupted. George was the interrupter. He had said nothing since entering the dining-room, but now he spoke in a loud and peremptory voice, using the tone of one in authority who checks idle prattle and settles a matter forever.

"Automobiles are a useless nuisance," he said.

There fell a moment's silence.

Isabel gazed incredulously at George, colour slowly heightening upon her cheeks and temples, while Fanny watched him with a quick eagerness, her eyes alert and bright. But Eugene seemed merely quizzical, as if not taking this brusquerie to himself. The Major was seriously disturbed.

"What did you say, George?" he asked, though George had spoken but too distinctly.

"I said all automobiles were a nuisance," George answered, repeating not only the words but the tone in which he had uttered them. And he added, "They'll never amount to anything but a nuisance. They had no business to be invented."

The Major frowned. "Of course you forget that Mr. Morgan makes them, and also did his share in inventing them. If you weren't so thoughtless he might think you rather offensive."

"That would be too bad," said George coolly. "I don't think I could survive it."

Again there was a silence, while the Major stared at his grandson aghast. But Eugene began to laugh cheerfully.

"I'm not sure he's wrong about automobiles," he said' "With all their speed forward they may be a step backward in civilization—that is, in spiritual civilization. It may be that they will not add to the beauty of the world, nor to the life of men's souls. I am not sure. But automobiles have come, and they bring a greater change in our life than most of us suspect. They are here, and almost all outward things are going to be different because of what they bring. They are going to alter war, and they are going to alter peace. I think men's minds are going to be changed in subtle ways because of automobiles; just how, though, I could hardly guess. But you can't have the immense outward changes that they will cause without some inward ones, and it may be that George is right, and that the spiritual alteration will be bad for us. Perhaps, ten or twenty years from now, if we can see the inward change in men by that time, I shouldn't be able to defend the gasoline engine, but would have to agree with him that automobiles 'had no business to be invented.'" He laughed good-naturedly, and looking at his watch, apologized for having an engagement which made his departure necessary when he would so much prefer to linger. Then he shook hands with the Major, and bade Isabel, George, and Fanny a cheerful good-night—a collective farewell cordially addressed to all three of them together—and left them at the table.

Isabel turned wondering, hurt eyes upon her son. "George, dear!" she said. "What *did* you mean?"

"Just what I said," he returned, lighting one of the Major's cigars, and his manner was imperturbable enough to warrant the definition (sometimes merited by imperturbability) of stubbornness.

Isabel's hand, pale and slender, upon the tablecloth, touched one of the fine silver candlesticks aimlessly: the fingers were seen to tremble. "Oh, he was hurt!" she murmured.

"I don't see why he should be," George said, "I didn't say anything about *him*. He didn't seem to me to be hurt—

seemed perfectly cheerful. What made you think he was hurt?"

"I know him!" was all of her reply, half whispered.

The Major stared hard at George from under his white eyebrows. "You didn't mean '*him*,' you say, George? I suppose if we had a clergyman as a guest here you'd expect him not to be offended, and to understand that your remarks were neither personal nor untactful, if you said the church was a nuisance and ought never to have been invented. By Jove, but you're a puzzle!"

"In what way, may I ask, sir?"

"We seem to have a new kind of young people these days," the old gentleman returned, shaking his head. "It's a new style of courting a pretty girl, certainly, for a young fellow to go deliberately out of his way to try and make an enemy of her father by attacking his business! By Jove! That's a new way to win a woman!"

George flushed angrily and seemed about to offer a retort, but held his breath for a moment; and then held his peace. It was Isabel who responded to the Major. "Oh, no!" she said. "Eugene would never be anybody's enemy—he couldn't —and last of all Georgie's. I'm afraid he was hurt, but I don't fear his not having understood that George spoke without thinking of what he was saying—I mean, without realizing its bearing on Eugene."

Again George seemed upon the point of speech, and again controlled the impulse. He thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and smoked, staring inflexibly at the ceiling.

"Well, well," said his grandfather, rising. "It wasn't a very successful little dinner!"

Thereupon he offered his arm to his daughter, who took it fondly, and they left the room, Isabel assuring him that all his little dinners were pleasant, and that this one was no exception.

George did not move, and Fanny, following the other two, came round the table, and paused close beside his chair; but

George remained posed in his great imperturbability, cigar between teeth, eyes upon ceiling, and paid no attention to her. Fanny waited until the sound of Isabel's and the Major's voices became inaudible in the hall. Then she said quickly, and in a low voice so eager that it was unsteady:

"George, you've struck *just* the treatment to adopt: you're doing the right thing!"

She hurried out, scurrying after the others with a faint rustling of her black skirts, leaving George mystified but incurious. He did not understand why she should bestow her approbation upon him in the matter, and cared so little whether she did or not that he spared himself even the trouble of being puzzled about it.

In truth, however, he was neither so comfortable nor so imperturbable as he appeared. He felt some gratification: he had done a little to put the man in his place—that man whose influence upon his daughter was precisely the same thing as a contemptuous criticism of George Amberson Minafer, and of George Amberson Minafer's "ideals of life." Lucy's going away without a word was intended, he supposed, as a bit of punishment. Well, he wasn't the sort of man that people were allowed to punish: he could demonstrate that to them—since they started it!

It appeared to him as almost a kind of insolence, this abrupt departure—not even telephoning! Probably she wondered how he would take it; she even might have supposed he would show some betraying chagrin when he heard of it.

He had no idea that this was just what he had shown; and he was satisfied with his evening's performance. Nevertheless, he was not comfortable in his mind; though he could not have explained his inward perturbations, for he was convinced, without any confirmation from his Aunt Fanny, that he had done "just the right thing."

CHAPTER XX

ISABEL came to George's door that night, and when she had kissed him good-night she remained in the open doorway with her hand upon his shoulder and her eyes thoughtfully lowered, so that her wish to say something more than good-night was evident. Not less obvious was her perplexity about the manner of saying it; and George, divining her thought, amiably made an opening for her.

"Well, old lady," he said indulgently, "you needn't look so worried. I won't be tactless with Morgan again. After this I'll just keep out of his way."

Isabel looked up, searching his face with the fond puzzlement which her eyes sometimes showed when they rested upon him; then she glanced down the hall toward Fanny's room, and, after another moment of hesitation, came quickly in, and closed the door.

"Dear," she said, "I wish you'd tell me something: Why don't you like Eugene?"

"Oh, I like him well enough," George returned, with a short laugh, as he sat down and began to unlace his shoes. "I like him well enough—in his place."

"No, dear," she said hurriedly. "I've had a feeling from the very first that you didn't really like him—that you really never liked him. Sometimes you've seemed to be friendly with him, and you'd laugh with him over something in a jolly, companionable way, and I'd think I was wrong, and that you really did like him, after all; but to-night I'm sure my other feeling was the right one: you don't like him. I can't understand it, dear; I don't see what can be the matter."

"Nothing's the matter."

This easy declaration naturally failed to carry great weight, and Isabel went on, in her troubled voice, "It seems so queer, especially when you feel as you do about his daughter."

At this, George stopped unlacing his shoes abruptly, and sat up. "How do I feel about his daughter?" he demanded.

"Well, it's seemed—as if—as if——" Isabel began timidly. "It did seem—— At least, you haven't looked at any other girl, ever since they came here, and—and certainly you've seemed very much interested in her. Certainly you've been very great *friends?*"

"Well, what of that?"

"It's only that I'm like your grandfather: I can't see how you could be so much interested in a girl and—and not feel very pleasantly toward her father."

"Well, I'll tell you something," George said slowly; and a frown of concentration could be seen upon his brow, as from a profound effort at self-examination. "I haven't ever thought much on that particular point, but I admit there may be a little something in what you say. The truth is, I don't believe I've ever thought of the two together, exactly—at least, not until lately. I've always thought of Lucy just as Lucy, and of Morgan just as Morgan. I've always thought of her as a person herself, not as anybody's daughter. I don't see what's very extraordinary about that. You've probably got plenty of friends, for instance, that don't care much about your son——"

"No, indeed!" she protested quickly. "And if I knew anybody who felt like that, I wouldn't——"

"Never mind," he interrupted, "I'll try to explain a little more. If I have a friend, I don't see that it's incumbent upon me to like that friend's relatives. If I didn't like them, and pretended to, I'd be a hypocrite. If that friend likes me and wants to stay my friend he'll have to stand my not liking his relatives, or else he can quit. I decline to be a hypocrite about it; that's all. Now, suppose I have certain ideas or ideals which I have chosen for the regulation of my own conduct in life. Suppose some friend of mine has a relative with ideals directly the opposite of mine, and my friend believes more in the relative's ideals than in mine: Do you think I ought to

give up my own just to please a person who's taken up ideals that I really despise?"

"No, dear; of course people can't give up their ideals; but I don't see what this has to do with dear little Lucy and——"

"I didn't say it had anything to do with them," he interrupted. "I was merely putting a case to show how a person would be justified in being a friend of one member of a family, and feeling anything but friendly toward another. I don't say, though, that I feel unfriendly to Mr. Morgan. I don't say that I feel friendly to him, and I don't say that I feel unfriendly; but if you really think that I was rude to him to-night——"

"Just thoughtless, dear. You didn't see that what you said to-night——"

"Well, I'll not say anything of that sort again where he can hear it. There, isn't that enough?"

This question, delivered with large indulgence, met with no response; for Isabel, still searching his face with her troubled and perplexed gaze, seemed not to have heard it. On that account, George repeated it, and rising, went to her and patted her reassuringly upon the shoulder. "There, old lady, you needn't fear my tactlessness will worry you again. I can't quite promise to like people I don't care about one way or another, but you can be sure I'll be careful, after this, not to let them see it. It's all right, and you'd better toddle along to bed, because I want to undress."

"But, George," she said earnestly, "you *would* like him, if you'd just let yourself. You say you don't dislike him. Why don't you like him? I can't understand at all. *What* is it that you don't——"

"There, there!" he said. "It's all right, and you toddle along."

"But, George——"

"Now, now! I really do want to get into bed. Good-night, old lady."

"Good-night, dear. But——"

"Let's not talk of it any more," he said. "It's all right, and

nothing in the world to worry about. So good-night, old lady. I'll be polite enough to him, never fear—if we happen to be thrown together. So *good*-night!"

"But, George, dear——"

"I'm going to bed, old lady; so good-night."

Thus the interview closed perforce. She kissed him again before going slowly to her own room, her perplexity evidently not dispersed; but the subject was not renewed between them the next day or subsequently. Nor did Fanny make any allusion to the cryptic approbation she had bestowed upon her nephew after the Major's "not very successful little dinner"; though she annoyed George by looking at him oftener and longer than he cared to be looked at by an aunt. He could not glance her way, it seemed, without finding her red-rimmed eyes fixed upon him eagerly, with an alert and hopeful calculation in them which he declared would send a nervous man into fits. For thus, one day, he broke out, in protest:

"It would!" he repeated vehemently. "Given time it would —straight into fits! What do you find the matter with me? Is my tie *always* slipping up behind? Can't you look at something else? My Lord! We'd better buy a cat for you to stare at, Aunt Fanny! A cat could stand it, maybe. What in the name of goodness do you expect to *see?*"

But Fanny laughed good-naturedly, and was not offended. "It's more as if I expected *you* to see something, isn't it?" she said quietly, still laughing.

"Now, what do you mean by that?"

"Never mind!"

"All right, I don't. But for heaven's sake stare at somebody else awhile. Try it on the housemaid!"

"Well, well," Fanny said indulgently, and then chose to be more obscure in her meaning than ever, for she adopted a tone of deep sympathy for her final remark, as she left him: "I don't wonder you're nervous these days, poor boy!"

And George indignantly supposed that she referred to the ordeal of Lucy's continued absence. During this period he successfully avoided contact with Lucy's father, though

Eugene came frequently to the house, and spent several evenings with Isabel and Fanny; and sometimes persuaded them and the Major to go for an afternoon's motoring. He did not, however, come again to the Major's Sunday evening dinner, even when George Amberson returned. Sunday evening was the time, he explained, for going over the week's work with his factory managers.

. . . When Lucy came home the autumn was far enough advanced to smell of burning leaves, and for the annual editorials, in the papers, on the purple haze, the golden branches, the ruddy fruit, and the pleasure of long tramps in the brown forest. George had not heard of her arrival, and he met her, on the afternoon following that event, at the Sharons', where he had gone in the secret hope that he might hear something about her. Janie Sharon had just begun to tell him that she heard Lucy was expected home soon, after having "a perfectly gorgeous time"—information which George received with no responsive enthusiasm—when Lucy came demurely in, a proper little autumn figure in green and brown.

Her cheeks were flushed, and her dark eyes were bright indeed; evidences, as George supposed, of the excitement incidental to the perfectly gorgeous time just concluded; though Janie and Mary Sharon both thought they were the effect of Lucy's having seen George's runabout in front of the house as she came in. George took on colour, himself, as he rose and nodded indifferently; and the hot suffusion to which he became subject extended its area to include his neck and ears. Nothing could have made him much more indignant than his consciousness of these symptoms of the icy indifference which it was his purpose not only to show but to feel.

She kissed her cousins, gave George her hand, said "How d'you do," and took a chair beside Janie with a composure which augmented George's indignation.

"How d'you do," he said. "I trust that ah—I trust—I do trust——"

He stopped, for it seemed to him that the word "trust"

sounded idiotic. Then, to cover his awkwardness, he coughed, and even to his own rosy ears his cough was ostentatiously a false one. Whereupon, seeking to be plausible, he coughed again, and instantly hated himself: the sound he made was an atrocity. Meanwhile, Lucy sat silent, and the two Sharon girls leaned forward, staring at him with strained eyes, their lips tightly compressed; and both were but too easily diagnosed as subject to an agitation which threatened their self-control. He began again.

"I tr—I hope you have had a—a pleasant time. I tr—hope you are well. I hope you are extremely—I hope extremely—extremely——" And again he stopped in the midst of his floundering, not knowing how to progress beyond "extremely," and unable to understand why the infernal word kept getting into his mouth.

"I beg your pardon?" Lucy said.

George was never more furious; he felt that he was "making a spectacle of himself"; and no young gentleman in the world was more loath than George Amberson Minafer to look a figure of fun. And while he stood there, undeniably such a figure, with Janie and Mary Sharon threatening to burst at any moment, if laughter were longer denied them, Lucy sat looking at him with her eyebrows delicately lifted in casual, polite inquiry. Her own complete composure was what most galled him.

"Nothing of the slightest importance!" he managed to say. "I was just leaving. *Good* afternoon!" And with long strides he reached the door, and hastened through the hall; but before he closed the front door he heard from Janie and Mary Sharon the outburst of wild, irrepressible emotion which his performance had inspired.

He drove home in a tumultuous mood, and almost ran down two ladies who were engaged in absorbing conversation at a crossing. They were his Aunt Fanny and the stout Mrs. Johnson; a jerk of the reins at the last instant saved them by a few inches; but their conversation was so interesting that they were unaware of their danger, and did not notice the

runabout, nor how close it came to them. George was so furious with himself and with the girl whose unexpected coming into a room could make him look such a fool, that it might have soothed him a little if he had actually run over the two absorbed ladies without injuring them beyond repair. At least, he said to himself that he wished he had; it might have taken his mind off himself for a few minutes. For, in truth, to be ridiculous (and know it) was one of several things that George was unable to endure. He was savage.

He drove into the Major's stable too fast, the sagacious Pendennis saving himself from going through a partition by a swerve which splintered a shaft of the runabout and almost threw the driver to the floor. George swore, and then swore again at the fat old darkey, Tom, for giggling at his swearing.

"Hoopee!" said old Tom. "Mus' been some white lady use Mist' Jawge mighty bad! White lady say, 'No, suh, I ain' go'n out ridin' 'ith Mist' Jawge no mo'!' Mist' Jawge drive in. 'Dam de dam worl'! Dam de dam hoss! Dam de dam nigga'! Dam de dam dam!' Hoopee!"

"That'll do!" George said sternly.

"Yessuh!"

George strode from the stable, crossed the Major's backyard, then passed behind the new houses, on his way home. These structures were now approaching completion, but still in a state of rawness hideous to George—though, for that matter, they were never to be anything except hideous to him. Behind them, stray planks, bricks, refuse of plaster and lath, shingles, straw, empty barrels, strips of twisted tin and broken tiles were strewn everywhere over the dried and pitted gray mud where once the suave lawn had lain like a green lake around those stately islands, the two Amberson houses. And George's state of mind was not improved by his present view of this repulsive area, nor by his sensations when he kicked an uptilted shingle only to discover that what uptilted it was a brickbat on the other side of it. After that, the whole world seemed to be one solid conspiracy of malevolence.

In this temper he emerged from behind the house nearest

to his own, and, glancing toward the street, saw his mother standing with Eugene Morgan upon the cement path that led to the front gate. She was bareheaded, and Eugene held his hat and stick in his hand; evidently he had been calling upon her, and she had come from the house with him, continuing their conversation and delaying their parting.

They had paused in their slow walk from the front door to the gate, yet still stood side by side, their shoulders almost touching, as though neither Isabel nor Eugene quite realized that their feet had ceased to bear them forward; and they were not looking at each other, but at some indefinite point before them, as people do who consider together thoughtfully and in harmony. The conversation was evidently serious; his head was bent, and Isabel's lifted left hand rested against her cheek; but all the significances of their thoughtful attitude denoted companionableness and a shared understanding. Yet, a stranger, passing, would not have thought them married: somewhere about Eugene, not quite to be located, there was a romantic gravity; and Isabel, tall and graceful, with high colour and absorbed eyes, was visibly no wife walking down to the gate with her husband.

George stared at them. A hot dislike struck him at the sight of Eugene; and a vague revulsion, like a strange, unpleasant taste in his mouth, came over him as he looked at his mother: her manner was eloquent of so much thought about her companion and of such reliance upon him. And the picture the two thus made was a vivid one indeed, to George, whose angry eyes, for some reason, fixed themselves most intently upon Isabel's lifted hand, upon the white ruffle at her wrist, bordering that graceful black sleeve, and upon the little indentations in her cheek where the tips of her fingers rested. She should not have worn white at her wrist, or at the throat either, George felt; and then, strangely, his resentment concentrated upon those tiny indentations at the tips of her fingers—actual changes, however slight and fleeting, in his mother's face, made because of Mr. Eugene Morgan. For the moment, it seemed to George that Morgan might have claimed the owner-

ship of a face that changed for him. It was as if he owned Isabel.

The two began to walk on toward the gate, where they stopped again, turning to face each other, and Isabel's glance, passing Eugene, fell upon George. Instantly she smiled and waved her hand to him; while Eugene turned and nodded; but George, standing as in some rigid trance, and staring straight at them, gave these signals of greeting no sign of recognition whatever. Upon this, Isabel called to him, waving her hand again.

"Georgie!" she called, laughing. "Wake up, dear! Georgie, hello!"

George turned away as if he had neither seen nor heard, and stalked into the house by the side door.

CHAPTER XXI

HE WENT to his room, threw off his coat, waistcoat, collar, and tie, letting them lie where they chanced to fall, and then, having violently enveloped himself in a black velvet dressing-gown, continued this action by lying down with a vehemence that brought a wheeze of protest from his bed. His repose was only a momentary semblance, however, for it lasted no longer than the time it took him to groan "Riff-raff!" between his teeth. Then he sat up, swung his feet to the floor, rose, and began to pace up and down the large room.

He had just been consciously rude to his mother for the first time in his life; for, with all his riding down of populace and riffraff, he had never before been either deliberately or impulsively disregardful of her. When he had hurt her it had been accidental; and his remorse for such an accident was always adequate compensation—and more—to Isabel. But now he had done a rough thing to her; and he did not repent; the rather he was the more irritated with her. And when he heard her presently go by his door with a light step singing cheerfully to herself as she went to her room, he perceived that she had mistaken his intention altogether, or, indeed, had failed to perceive that he had any intention at all. Evidently she had concluded that he refused to speak to her and Morgan out of sheer absent-mindedness, supposing him so immersed in some preoccupation that he had not seen them or heard her calling to him. Therefore there was nothing of which to repent, even if he had been so minded; and probably Eugene himself was unaware that any disapproval had recently been expressed. George snorted. What sort of a dreamy loon did they take him to be?

There came a delicate, eager tapping at his door, not done with a knuckle but with the tip of a finger-nail, which was

instantly clarified to George's mind's eye as plainly as if he saw it: the long and polished white-mooned pink shield on the end of his Aunt Fanny's right forefinger. But George was in no mood for human communications, and even when things went well he had little pleasure in Fanny's society. Therefore it is not surprising that at the sound of her tapping, instead of bidding her enter, he immediately crossed the room with the intention of locking the door to keep her out.

Fanny was too eager, and, opening the door before he reached it, came quickly in and closed it behind her. She was in a street dress and a black hat, with a black umbrella in her black-gloved hand—for Fanny's heavy mourning, at least, was nowhere tempered with a glimpse of white, though the anniversary of Wilbur's death had passed. An infinitesimal perspiration gleamed upon her pale skin; she breathed fast, as if she had run up the stairs; and excitement was sharp in her widened eyes. Her look was that of a person who had just seen something extraordinary or heard thrilling news.

"Now, what on earth do *you* want?" her chilling nephew demanded.

"George," she said hurriedly, "I saw what you did when you wouldn't speak to them. I was sitting with Mrs. Johnson at her front window, across the street, and I saw it all."

"Well, what of it?"

"You did right!" Fanny said with a vehemence not the less spirited because she suppressed her voice almost to a whisper. "You did exactly right! You're behaving splendidly about the whole thing, and I want to tell you I know your father would thank you if he could see what you're doing."

"My Lord!" George broke out at her. "You make me dizzy! For heaven's sake quit the mysterious detective business—at least do quit it around me! Go and try it on somebody else, if you like; but *I* don't want to hear it!"

She began to tremble, regarding him with a fixed gaze. "You don't care to hear then," she said huskily, "that I approve of what you're doing?"

"Certainly not! Since I haven't the faintest idea what you

think I'm 'doing,' naturally I don't care whether you approve of it or not. All I'd like, if you please, is to be alone. I'm not giving a tea here, this afternoon, if you'll permit me to mention it!"

Fanny's gaze wavered; she began to blink; then suddenly she sank into a chair and wept silently, but with a terrible desolation.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake!" he moaned. "What in the world is wrong with you?"

"You're always picking on me," she quavered wretchedly, her voice indistinct with the wetness that bubbled into it from her tears. "You do—you always pick on me! You've always done it—always—ever since you were a little boy! Whenever anything goes wrong with you, you take it out on me! You do! You always——"

George flung to heaven a gesture of despair; it seemed to him the last straw that Fanny should have chosen this particular time to come and sob in his room over his mistreatment of her!

"Oh, my Lord!" he whispered; then, with a great effort, addressed her in a reasonable tone: "Look here, Aunt Fanny; I don't see what you're making all this fuss about. Of course I know I've teased you sometimes, but——"

"'*Teased*' me?" she wailed. "'*Teased*' me! Oh, it does seem too hard, sometimes—this mean old life of mine does seem too hard! I don't think I *can* stand it! Honestly, I don't think I can! I came in here just to show you I sympathized with you—just to say something *pleasant* to you, and you treat me as if I were—oh, no, you *wouldn't* treat a servant the way you treat me! You wouldn't treat anybody in the world like this except old Fanny. 'Old Fanny' you say. 'It's nobody but old Fanny, so I'll kick her—nobody will resent it. I'll kick her all I want to!' You do! That's how you think of me—I know it! And you're right: I haven't got anything in the world, since my brother died—nobody—nothing—nothing!"

"Oh my *Lord!*" George groaned.

Fanny spread out her small, soaked handkerchief, and shook it in the air to dry it a little, crying as damply and as wretchedly during this operation as before—a sight which gave George a curious shock to add to his other agitations, it seemed so strange. "I ought not to have come," she went on, "because I might have known it would only give you an excuse to pick on me again! I'm sorry enough I came, I can tell you! I didn't mean to speak of it again to you, at all; and I wouldn't have, but I saw how you treated them, and I guess I got excited about it, and couldn't help following the impulse—but I'll know better next time, I can tell you! I'll keep my mouth shut as I meant to, and as I would have, if I hadn't got excited and if I hadn't felt sorry for you. But what does it matter to anybody if I'm sorry for them? I'm only old Fanny!"

"Oh, good gracious! How *can* it matter to me who's sorry for me when I don't know what they're sorry about!"

"You're so proud," she quavered, "and so hard! I *tell* you I didn't mean to speak of it to you, and I never, never in the world would have *told* you about it, nor have made the faintest reference to it, if I hadn't seen that somebody else had told you, or you'd found out for yourself some way. I——"

In despair of her intelligence, and in some doubt of his own, George struck the palms of his hands together. "Somebody else had told me what? I'd found *what* out for myself?"

"How people are talking about your mother."

Except for the incidental teariness of her voice, her tone was casual, as though she mentioned a subject previously discussed and understood; for Fanny had no doubt that George had only pretended to be mystified because, in his pride, he would not in words admit that he knew what he knew.

"What did you say?" he asked incredulously.

"Of course *I* understood what you were doing," Fanny went on, drying her handkerchief again. "It puzzled other people when you began to be rude to Eugene, because they couldn't see how you could treat him as you did when you

were so interested in Lucy. But I remembered how you came to me, that other time when there was so much talk about Isabel; and I knew you'd give Lucy up in a minute, if it came to a question of your mother's reputation, because you said then that——"

"Look here," George interrupted in a shaking voice. "Look here, I'd like——" He stopped, unable to go on, his agitation was so great. His chest heaved as from hard running, and his complexion, pallid at first, had become mottled; fiery splotches appearing at his temples and cheeks. "What do you mean by telling me—telling me there's talk about—about——" He gulped, and began again: "What do you mean by using such words as 'reputation'? What do you mean, speaking of a 'question' of my—my mother's reputation?"

Fanny looked up at him woefully over the handkerchief which she now applied to her reddened nose. "God knows I'm sorry for you, George," she murmured. "I wanted to say so, but it's only old Fanny, so whatever she says—even when it's sympathy—pick on her for it! Hammer her!" She sobbed. "Hammer her! It's only poor old lonely Fanny!"

"You look here!" George said harshly. "When I spoke to my Uncle George after that rotten thing I heard Aunt Amelia say about my mother, he said if there was any gossip it was about *you!* He said people might be laughing about the way you ran after Morgan, but that was all."

Fanny lifted her hands, clenched them, and struck them upon her knees. "Yes, it's always Fanny!" she sobbed. "Ridiculous old Fanny—always, always!"

"You listen!" George said. "After I'd talked to Uncle George I saw *you;* and you said I had a mean little mind for thinking there might be truth in what Aunt Amelia said about people talking. You denied it. And that wasn't the only time; you'd attacked me before then, because I intimated that Morgan might be coming here too often. You made me believe that mother let him come entirely on your account, and *now* you say——"

"I think he did," Fanny interrupted desolately. "I think he did come as much to see me as anything—for a *while* it looked like it. Anyhow, he liked to dance with me. He danced with me as much as he danced with her, and he acted as if he came on my account at least as much as he did on hers. He *did* act a good deal that way—and if Wilbur hadn't died——"

"You told me there *wasn't* any talk."

"I didn't think there was much, then," Fanny protested. "*I* didn't know how much there was."

"What!"

"People don't come and tell such things to a person's family, you know. You don't suppose anybody was going to say to George Amberson, that his sister was getting herself talked about, do you? Or that they were going to say much to *me?*"

"You told me," said George, fiercely, "that mother never saw him except when she was chaperoning you."

"They weren't much alone together, then," Fanny returned. "Hardly ever, before Wilbur died. But you don't suppose *that* stops people from talking, do you? Your father never went anywhere, and people saw Eugene with her everywhere she went—and though I was with them people just thought"—she choked—"they just thought I didn't count! 'Only old Fanny Minafer,' I suppose they'd say! Besides, everybody knew that he'd been engaged to her——"

"What's that?" George cried.

"Everybody knows it. Don't you remember your grandfather speaking of it at the Sunday dinner one night?"

"He didn't say they were engaged or——"

"Well, they were! Everybody knows it; and she broke it off on account of that serenade when Eugene didn't know what he was doing. He drank when he was a young man, and she wouldn't stand it, but everybody in this town knows that Isabel has never really cared for any other man in her life! Poor Wilbur! He was the only soul alive that didn't know it!"

Nightmare had descended upon the unfortunate George;

he leaned back against the foot-board of his bed, gazing wildly at his aunt. "I believe I'm going crazy," he said. "You mean when you told me there wasn't any talk, you told me a falsehood?"

"No!" Fanny gasped.

"You did!"

"I tell you I didn't know how much talk there *was*, and it wouldn't have amounted to much if Wilbur had lived." And Fanny completed this with a fatal admission: "I didn't want you to interfere."

George overlooked the admission; his mind was not now occupied with analysis. "What do you mean," he asked, "when you say that if father had lived, the talk wouldn't have amounted to anything?"

"Things might have been—they might have been different."

"You mean Morgan might have married *you?*"

Fanny gulped. "No. Because I don't know that I'd have accepted him." She had ceased to weep, and now she sat up stiffly. "I certainly didn't care enough about him to marry him; I wouldn't have let myself care that much until he showed that he wished to marry me. I'm not that sort of person!" The poor lady paid her vanity this piteous little tribute. "What I mean is, if Wilbur hadn't died, people wouldn't have had it proved before their very *eyes* that what they'd been talking about was true!"

"You say—you say that people believe——" George shuddered, then forced himself to continue, in a sick voice: "They believe my mother is—is in love with that man?"

"Of course!"

"And because he comes here—and they see her with him driving—and all that—they think they were right when they said she was in—in love with him before—before my father died?"

She looked at him gravely with her eyes now dry between their reddened lids. "Why, George," she said, gently, "don't

you know that's what they say? You *must* know that everybody in town thinks they're going to be married very soon."

George uttered an incoherent cry; and sections of him appeared to writhe. He was upon the verge of actual nausea.

"You know it!" Fanny cried, getting up. "You don't think I'd have spoken of it to you unless I was sure you knew it?" Her voice was wholly genuine, as it had been throughout the wretched interview: Fanny's sincerity was unquestionable. "George, *I* wouldn't have told you, if you didn't know. What other reason could you have for treating Eugene as you did, or for refusing to speak to them like that, awhile ago in the yard? Somebody *must* have told you?"

"Who told *you?*" he said.

"What?"

"Who told you there was talk? Where *is* this talk? Where does it come from? Who does it?"

"Why, I suppose pretty much everybody," she said. "I know it must be pretty general."

"Who said so?"

"What?"

George stepped close to her. "You say people don't speak to a person of gossip about that person's family. Well, how did you hear it, then? How did you get hold of it? Answer me!"

Fanny looked thoughtful. "Well, of course nobody not one's most intimate friends would speak to them about such things, and then only in the kindest, most considerate way."

"Who's spoken of it to you in any way at all?" George demanded.

"Why——" Fanny hesitated.

"You answer me!"

"I hardly think it would be fair to give names."

"Look here," said George. "One of your most intimate friends is that mother of Charlie Johnson's, for instance. Has *she* ever mentioned this to you? You say everybody is talking. Is she one?"

"Oh, she may have intimated——"

"I'm asking you: Has she ever spoken of it to you?"

"She's a very kind, discreet woman, George; but she may have intimated——"

George had a sudden intuition, as there flickered into his mind the picture of a street-crossing and two absorbed ladies almost run down by a fast horse. "You and she have been talking about it to-day!" he cried. "You were talking about it with her not two hours ago. Do you deny it?"

"I——"

"Do you deny it?"

"No!"

"All right," said Goerge. "That's enough!"

She caught at his arm as he turned away. "What are you going to do, George?"

"I'll not talk about it, now," he said heavily. "I think you've done a good deal for one day, Aunt Fanny!"

And Fanny, seeing the passion in his face, began to be alarmed. She tried to retain possession of the black velvet sleeve which her fingers had clutched, and he suffered her to do so, but used this leverage to urge her to the door. "George, you know I'm sorry for you, whether you care or not," she whimpered. "I never in the world would have spoken of it, if I hadn't thought you knew all about it. *I* wouldn't have——"

But he had opened the door with his free hand "Never mind!" he said, and she was obliged to pass out into the hall, the door closing quickly behind her.

CHAPTER XXII

GEORGE took off his dressing-gown and put on a collar and a tie, his fingers shaking so that the tie was not his usual success; then he picked up his coat and waistcoat, and left the room while still in process of donning them, fastening the buttons as he ran down the front stairs to the door. It was not until he reached the middle of the street that he realized that he had forgotten his hat; and he paused for an irresolute moment, during which his eye wandered, for no reason, to the Fountain of Neptune. This castiron replica of too elaborate sculpture stood at the next corner, where the Major had placed it when the Addition was laid out so long ago. The street corners had been shaped to conform with the great octagonal basin, which was no great inconvenience for horse-drawn vehicles, but a nuisance to speeding automobiles; and, even as George looked, one of the latter, coming too fast, saved itself only by a dangerous skid as it rounded the fountain. This skid was to George's liking, though he would have been more pleased to see the car go over, for he was wishing grief and destruction, just then, upon all the automobiles in the world.

His eyes rested a second or two longer upon the Fountain of Neptune, not an enlivening sight even in the shielding haze of autumn twilight. For more than a year no water had run in the fountain: the connections had been broken, and the Major was evasive about restorations, even when reminded by his grandson that a dry fountain is as gay as a dry fish. Soot streaks and a thousand pits gave Neptune the distinction, at least, of leprosy, which the mermaids associated with him had been consistent in catching; and his trident had been so deeply affected as to drop its prongs. Altogether, this heavy work of heavy art, smoked dry, hugely scabbed,

cracked, and crumbling, was a dismal sight to the distracted eye of George Amberson Minafer, and its present condition of craziness may have added a mite to his own. His own was sufficient, with no additions, however, as he stood looking at the Johnsons' house and those houses on both sides of it—that row of riffraff dwellings he had thought so damnable, the day when he stood in his grandfather's yard, staring at them, after hearing what his Aunt Amelia said of the "talk" about his mother.

He decided that he needed no hat for the sort of call he intended to make, and went forward hurriedly. Mrs. Johnson was at home, the Irish girl who came to the door informed him, and he was left to await the lady, in a room like an elegant well—the Johnsons' "reception-room": floor space, nothing to mention; walls, blue calcimined; ceiling, twelve feet from the floor; inside shutters and gray lace curtains; five gilt chairs, a brocaded sofa, soiled, and an inlaid walnut table, supporting two tall alabaster vases; a palm, with two leaves, dying in a corner.

Mrs. Johnson came in, breathing noticeably; and her round head, smoothly but economically decorated with the hair of an honest woman, seemed to be lingering far in the background of the Alpine bosom which took precedence of the rest of her everywhere; but when she was all in the room, it was to be seen that her breathing was the result of hospitable haste to greet the visitor, and her hand, not so dry as Neptune's Fountain, suggested that she had paused for only the briefest ablutions. George accepted this cold, damp lump mechanically.

"Mr. Amberson—I mean Mr. Minafer!" she exclaimed. "I'm really delighted: I understood you asked for me. Mr. Johnson's out of the city, but Charlie's downtown and I'm looking for him at any minute, now, and he'll be so pleased that you——"

"I didn't want to see Charlie," George said. "I want——"

"Do sit down," the hospitable lady urged him, seating herself upon the sofa. "Do sit down."

"No, I thank you. I wish——"

"Surely you're not going to run away again, when you've just come. Do sit down, Mr. Minafer. I hope you're all well at your house and at the dear old Major's, too. He's looking——"

"Mrs. Johnson" George said, in a strained loud voice which arrested her attention immediately, so that she was abruptly silent, leaving her surprised mouth open. She had already been concealing some astonishment at this unexampled visit, however, and the condition of George's ordinarily smooth hair (for he had overlooked more than his hat) had not alleviated her perplexity. "Mrs. Johnson," he said, "I have come to ask you a few questions which I would like you to answer, if you please."

She became grave at once. "Certainly, Mr. Minafer. Anything I can——"

He interrupted sternly, yet his voice shook in spite of its sternness. "You were talking with my Aunt Fanny about my mother this afternoon."

At this Mrs. Johnson uttered an involuntary gasp, but she recovered herself. "Then I'm sure our conversation was a very pleasant one, if we were talking of your mother, because——"

Again he interrupted. "My aunt has told me what the conversation virtually was, and I don't mean to waste any time, Mrs. Johnson. You were talking about a——" George's shoulders suddenly heaved uncontrollably; but he went fiercely on: "You were discussing a scandal that involved my mother's name."

"Mr. Minafer!"

"Isn't that the truth?"

"I don't feel called upon to answer, Mr. Minafer," she said with visible agitation. "I do not consider that you have any right——"

"My aunt told me you repeated this scandal to her."

"I don't think your aunt can have said that," Mrs. Johnson returned sharply. "I did not repeat a scandal of any

kind to your aunt and I think you are mistaken in saying she told you I did. We may have discussed some matters that have been a topic of comment about town——"

"Yes!" George cried. "I think you may have! That's what I'm here about, and what I intend to——"

"Don't tell *me* what you intend, please," Mrs. Johnson interrupted crisply. "And I should prefer that you would not make your voice quite so loud in this house, which I happen to own. Your aunt may have told you—though I think it would have been very unwise in her if she did, and not very considerate of *me*—she may have told you that we discussed some such topic as I have mentioned, and possibly that would have been true. If I talked it over with her, you may be sure I spoke in the most charitable spirit, and without sharing in other people's disposition to put an evil interpretation on what *may* be nothing more than unfortunate appearances and——"

"My God!" said George. "I can't stand this!"

"You have the option of dropping the subject," Mrs. Johnson suggested tartly, and she added: "Or of leaving the house."

"I'll do that soon enough, but first I mean to know——"

"I am perfectly willing to tell you anything you wish if you will remember to ask it quietly. I'll also take the liberty of reminding you that I had a perfect right to discuss the subject with your aunt. Other people may be less considerate in not confining their discussion of it, as I have, to charitable views expressed only to a member of the family. Other people——"

"Other people!" the unhappy George repeated viciously. "That's what I want to know about—these other people!"

"I beg your pardon."

"I want to ask you about them. You say you know of other people who talk about this."

"I presume they do."

"How many?"

"What?"

"I want to know how many other people talk about it?"

"Dear, dear!" she protested. "How should I know that?"

"Haven't you heard anybody mention it?"

"I presume so."

"Well, how *many* have you heard?"

Mrs. Johnson was becoming more annoyed than apprehensive, and she showed it. "Really, this isn't a court-room," she said. "And I'm not a defendant in a libel-suit, either!"

The unfortunate young man lost what remained of his balance. "You may be!" he cried, "I intend to know just who's dared to say these things, if I have to force my way into every house in town, and I'm going to make them take every word of it back! I mean to know the name of every slanderer that's spoken of this matter to you and of every tattler you've passed it on to yourself. I mean to know——"

"You'll know *something* pretty quick!" she said, rising with difficulty; and her voice was thick with the sense of insult. "You'll know that you're out in the street. Please to leave my house!"

George stiffened sharply. Then he bowed, and strode out of the door.

Three minutes later, dishevelled and perspiring, but cold all over, he burst into his Uncle George's room at the Major's without knocking. Amberson was dressing.

"Good gracious, Georgie!" he exclaimed. "What's up?"

"I've just come from Mrs. Johnson's—across the street," George panted.

"You have your own tastes!" was Amberson's comment. "But curious as they are, you ought to do something better with your hair, and button your waistcoat to the right buttons—even for Mrs. Johnson! What were you doing over there?"

"She told me to leave the house," George said desperately. "I went there because Aunt Fanny told me the whole town was talking about my mother and that man Morgan—that they say my mother is going to marry him and that proves she was too fond of him before my father died—she said this

Mrs. Johnson was one that talked about it, and I went to her to ask who were the others."

Amberson's jaw fell in dismay. "Don't tell me you did that!" he said, in a low voice; and then, seeing that it was true, "Oh, now you *have* done it!"

CHAPTER XXIII

I'VE 'done it'?" George cried. "What do you mean: I've done it? And what have I done?"

Amberson had collapsed into an easy chair beside his dressing-table, the white evening tie he had been about to put on dangling from his hand, which had fallen limply on the arm of the chair. The tie dropped to the floor before he replied; and the hand that had held it was lifted to stroke his graying hair reflectively. "By Jove!" he muttered. "That *is* too bad!"

George folded his arms bitterly. "Will you kindly answer my question? What have I done that wasn't honourable and right? Do you think these riffraff can go about bandying my mother's name——"

"They can now," said Amberson. "I don't know if they could before, but they certainly can now!"

"What do you mean by that?"

His uncle sighed profoundly, picked up his tie, and, preoccupied with despondency, twisted the strip of white lawn till it became unwearable. Meanwhile, he tried to enlighten his nephew. "Gossip is never fatal, Georgie," he said, "until it is denied. Gossip goes on about every human being alive and about all the dead that are alive enough to be remembered, and yet almost never does any harm until some defender makes a controversy. Gossip's a nasty thing, but it's sickly, and if people of good intentions will let it entirely alone, it will die, ninety-nine times out of a hundred."

"See here," George said: "I didn't come to listen to any generalizing dose of philosophy! I ask you——"

"You asked me what you've done, and I'm telling you." Amberson gave him a melancholy smile, continuing: "Suffer me to do it in my own way. Fanny says there's been talk about your mother, and that Mrs. Johnson does some of it. I don't know, because naturally nobody would come to me

with such stuff or mention it before me; but it's presumably true—I suppose it is. I've seen Fanny with Mrs. Johnson quite a lot; and that old lady is a notorious gossip, and that's why she ordered you out of her house when you pinned her down that she'd been gossiping. I have a suspicion Mrs. Johnson has been quite a comfort to Fanny in their long talks; but she'll probably quit speaking to her over this, because Fanny told you. I suppose it's true that the 'whole town,' a lot of others, that is, do share in the gossip. In this town, naturally, anything about any Amberson has always been a stone dropped into the centre of a pond, and a lie would send the ripples as far as a truth would. I've been on a steamer when the story went all over the boat, the second day out, that the prettiest girl on board didn't have any ears; and you can take it as a rule that when a woman's past thirty-five the prettier her hair is, the more certain you are to meet somebody with reliable information that it's a wig. You can be sure that for many years there's been more gossip in this place about the Ambersons than about any other family. I dare say it isn't so much so now as it used to be, because the town got too big long ago, but it's the truth that the more prominent you are the more gossip there is about you, and the more people would like to pull you down. Well, they can't do it as long as you refuse to know what gossip there is about you. But the minute you notice it, it's got you! I'm not speaking of certain kinds of slander that sometimes people have got to take to the courts; I'm talking of the wretched buzzing the Mrs. Johnsons do—the thing you seem to have such a horror of—people 'talking'—the kind of thing that has assailed your mother. People who have repeated a slander either get ashamed or forget it, if they're let alone. Challenge them, and in self-defence they believe everything they've said: they'd rather believe you a sinner than believe themselves liars, naturally. Submit to gossip and you kill it; fight it and you make it strong. People will forget almost any slander except one that's been fought."

"Is that all?" George asked.

"I suppose so," his uncle murmured sadly.

"Well, then, may I ask what you'd have done, in my place?"

"I'm not sure, Georgie. When I was your age I was like you in many ways, especially in not being very cool-headed, so I can't say. Youth can't be trusted for much, except asserting itself and fighting and making love."

"Indeed!" George snorted. "May I ask what you think I *ought* to have done?"

"Nothing."

"'Nothing?'" George echoed, mocking bitterly. "I suppose you think I mean to let my mother's good name——"

"Your mother's good name!" Amberson cut him off impatiently. "Nobody has a good name in a bad mouth. Nobody has a good name in a silly mouth, either. Well, your mother's name was in some silly mouths, and all you've done was to go and have a scene with the worst old woman gossip in the town—a scene that's going to make her into a partisan against your mother, whereas she was a mere prattler before. Don't you suppose she'll be all over town with this to-morrow? To-morrow? Why, she'll have her telephone going to-night as long as any of her friends are up! People that never heard anything about this are going to hear it all now, with embellishments. And she'll see to it that everybody who's hinted anything about poor Isabel will know that you're on the warpath; and that will put them on the defensive and make them vicious. The story will grow as it spreads and——"

George unfolded his arms to strike his right fist into his left palm. "But do you suppose I'm going to tolerate such things?" he shouted. "What do you suppose *I'll* be doing?"

"Nothing helpful."

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

"You can do absolutely nothing," said Amberson. "Nothing of any use. The more you do the more harm you'll do."

"You'll see! I'm going to stop this thing if I have to force my way into every house on National Avenue and Amberson Boulevard!"

His uncle laughed rather sourly, but made no other comment.

"Well, what do *you* propose to do?" George demanded. "Do you propose to sit there——"

"Yes."

"—and let this riffraff bandy my mother's good name back and forth among them? Is that what *you* propose to do?"

"It's all I *can* do," Amberson returned. "It's all any of us can do now: just sit still and hope that the thing may die down in time, in spite of your stirring up that awful old woman."

George drew a long breath, then advanced and stood close before his uncle. "Didn't you understand me when I told you that people are saying my mother means to marry this man?"

"Yes, I understood you."

"You say that my going over there has made matters worse," George went on. "How about it if such a—such an unspeakable marriage did take place? Do you think *that* would make people believe they'd been wrong in saying—you know what they say."

"No," said Amberson deliberately; "I don't believe it would. There'd be more badness in the bad mouths and more silliness in the silly mouths, I dare say. But it wouldn't hurt Isabel and Eugene, if they never heard of it; and if they did hear of it, then they could take their choice between placating gossip or living for their own happiness. If they have decided to marry——"

George almost staggered. "Good God!" he gasped. "You speak of it calmly!"

Amberson looked up at him inquiringly. "Why shouldn't they marry if they want to?" he asked. "It's their own affair."

"Why shouldn't they?" George echoed. "Why shouldn't they?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't they? I don't see anything precisely monstrous about two people getting married when they're both free and care about each other. What's the matter with their marrying?"

"It *would* be monstrous!" George shouted. "Monstrous even if *this* horrible thing hadn't happened, but *now* in the face of *this*—oh, that you can sit there and even speak of it! Your own sister! O God! Oh——" He became incoherent, swinging away from Amberson and making for the door, wildly gesturing.

"For heaven's sake, don't be so theatrical!" said his uncle, and then, seeing that George was leaving the room: "Come back here. You mustn't speak to your mother of this!"

"Don't 'tend to," George said indistinctly; and he plunged out into the big dimly lit hall. He passed his grandfather's room on the way to the stairs; and the Major was visible within, his white head brightly illumined by a lamp, as he bent low over a ledger upon his roll-top desk. He did not look up, and his grandson strode by the door, not really conscious of the old figure stooping at its tremulous work with long additions and subtractions that refused to balance as they used to. George went home and got a hat and overcoat without seeing either his mother or Fanny. Then he left word that he would be out for dinner, and hurried away from the house.

He walked the dark streets of Amberson Addition for an hour, then went downtown and got coffee at a restaurant. After that he walked through the lighted parts of the town until ten o'clock, when he turned north and came back to the purlieus of the Addition. He strode through the length and breadth of it again, his hat pulled down over his forehead, his overcoat collar turned up behind. He walked fiercely, though his feet ached, but by and by he turned homeward, and, when he reached the Major's, went in and sat upon the steps of the huge stone veranda in front—an obscure figure in that lonely and repellent place. All lights were out at the Major's, and finally, after twelve, he saw his mother's window darken at home.

He waited half an hour longer, then crossed the front yards of the new houses and let himself noiselessly in the front door. The light in the hall had been left burning, and another in his own room, as he discovered when he got there. He locked

the door quickly and without noise, but his fingers were still upon the key when there was a quick footfall in the hall outside.

"Georgie, dear?"

He went to the other end of the room before replying.

"Yes?"

"I'd been wondering where you were, dear."

"Had you?"

There was a pause; then she said timidly: "Wherever it was, I hope you had a pleasant evening."

After a silence, "Thank you," he said, without expression.

Another silence followed before she spoke again.

"You wouldn't care to be kissed good-night, I suppose?" And with a little flurry of placative laughter, she added: "At your age, of course!"

"I'm going to bed, now," he said. "Good-night."

Another silence seemed blanker than those which had preceded it, and finally her voice came—it was blank, too.

"Good-night."

. . . After he was in bed his thoughts became more tumultuous than ever; while among all the inchoate and fragmentary sketches of this dreadful day, now rising before him, the clearest was of his uncle collapsed in a big chair with a white tie dangling from his hand; and one conviction, following upon that picture, became definite in George's mind: that his Uncle George Amberson was a hopeless dreamer from whom no help need be expected, an amiable imbecile lacking in normal impulses, and wholly useless in a struggle which required honour to be defended by a man of action.

Then would return a vision of Mrs. Johnson's furious round head, set behind her great bosom like the sun far sunk on the horizon of a mountain plateau—and her crackling, asthmatic voice. . . . "Without sharing in other people's disposition to put an evil interpretation on what *may* be nothing more than unfortunate appearances." . . . "Other people may be less considerate in not confining their discussion of it, as I have,

to charitable views." . . . "You'll know *something* pretty quick! You'll know you're out in the street." . . . And then George would get up again—and again—and pace the floor in his bare feet.

That was what the tormented young man was doing when daylight came gauntly in at his window—pacing the floor, rubbing his head in his hands, and muttering:

"It can't be true: this can't be happening to *me!*"

CHAPTER XXIV

BREAKFAST was brought to him in his room, as usual; but he did not make his normal healthy raid upon the dainty tray: the food remained untouched, and he sustained himself upon coffee—four cups of it, which left nothing of value inside the glistening little percolator. During this process he heard his mother being summoned to the telephone in the hall, not far from his door, and then her voice responding: "Yes? Oh, it's you! . . . Indeed I should! . . . Of course. . . . Then I'll expect you about three. . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye till then." A few minutes later he heard her speaking to someone beneath his window and, looking out, saw her directing the removal of plants from a small garden bed to the Major's conservatory for the winter. There was an air of briskness about her; as she turned away to go into the house, she laughed gayly with the Major's gardener over something he said, and this unconcerned cheerfulness of her was terrible to her son.

He went to his desk, and, searching the jumbled contents of a drawer, brought forth a large, unframed photograph of his father, upon which he gazed long and piteously, till at last hot tears stood in his eyes. It was strange how the inconsequent face of Wilbur seemed to increase in high significance during this belated interview between father and son; and how it seemed to take on a reproachful nobility—and yet, under the circumstances, nothing could have been more natural than that George, having paid but the slightest attention to his father in life, should begin to deify him, now that he was dead. "Poor, poor father!" the son whispered brokenly. "Poor man, I'm glad you didn't know!"

He wrapped the picture in a sheet of newspaper, put it under his arm, and, leaving the house hurriedly and stealthily, went downtown to the shop of a silversmith, where he spent

sixty dollars on a resplendently festooned silver frame for the picture. Having lunched upon more coffee, he returned to the house at two o'clock, carrying the framed photograph with him, and placed it upon the centre-table in the library, the room most used by Isabel and Fanny and himself. Then he went to a front window of the long "reception-room," and sat looking out through the lace curtains.

The house was quiet, though once or twice he heard his mother and Fanny moving about upstairs, and a ripple of song in the voice of Isabel—a fragment from the romantic ballad of Lord Bateman.

"Lord Bateman was a noble lord,
A noble lord of high degree;
And he sailed West and he sailed East,
Far countries for to see. . . ."

The words became indistinct; the air was hummed absently; the humming shifted to a whistle, then drifted out of hearing, and the place was still again.

George looked often at his watch, but his vigil did not last an hour. At ten minutes of three, peering through the curtain, he saw an automobile stop in front of the house and Eugene Morgan jump lightly down from it. The car was of a new pattern, low and long, with an ample seat in the tonneau, facing forward; and a professional driver sat at the wheel, a strange figure in leather, goggled out of all personality and seemingly part of the mechanism.

Eugene himself, as he came up the cement path to the house, was a figure of the new era which was in time to be so disastrous to stiff hats and skirted coats; and his appearance afforded a debonair contrast to that of the queer-looking duck capering at the Amberson Ball in an old dress coat, and next day chugging up National Avenue through the snow in his nightmare of a sewing-machine. Eugene, this afternoon, was richly in the new outdoor mode: his motoring coat was soft gray fur; his cap and gloves were of gray suède; and though Lucy's hand may have shown itself in the selection of these

high garnitures, he wore them easily, even with a becoming hint of jauntiness. Some change might be seen in his face, too, for a successful man is seldom to be mistaken, especially if his temper be genial. Eugene had begun to look like a millionaire.

But above everything else, what was most evident about him, as he came up the path, was his confidence in the happiness promised by his present errand; the anticipation in his eyes could have been read by a stranger. His look at the door of Isabel's house was the look of a man who is quite certain that the next moment will reveal something ineffably charming, inexpressibly dear.

. . . When the bell rang, George waited at the entrance of the "reception-room" until a housemaid came through the hall on her way to answer the summons.

"You needn't mind, Mary," he told her. "I'll see who it is and what they want. Probably it's only a pedlar."

"Thank you, sir, Mister George," said Mary; and returned to the rear of the house.

George went slowly to the front door, and halted, regarding the misty silhouette of the caller upon the ornamental frosted glass. After a minute of waiting, this silhouette changed outline so that an arm could be distinguished—an arm outstretched toward the bell, as if the gentleman outside doubted whether or not it had sounded, and were minded to try again. But before the gesture was completed George abruptly threw open the door, and stepped squarely upon the middle of the threshold.

A slight change shadowed the face of Eugene; his look of happy anticipation gave way to something formal and polite. "How do you do, George," he said. "Mrs. Minafer expects to go driving with me, I believe—if you'll be so kind as to send her word that I'm here."

George made not the slightest movement.

"No," he said.

Eugene was incredulous, even when his second glance revealed how hot of eye was the haggard young man before him. "I beg your pardon. I said——"

"I heard you," said George. "You said you had an engagement with my mother, and I told you, No!"

Eugene gave him a steady look, and then he asked quietly: "What is the—the difficulty?"

George kept his own voice quiet enough, but that did not mitigate the vibrant fury of it. "My mother will have no interest in knowing that you came for her to-day," he said. "Or any other day!"

Eugene continued to look at him with a scrutiny in which began to gleam a profound anger, none the less powerful because it was so quiet. "I am afraid I do not understand you."

"I doubt if I could make it much plainer," George said, raising his voice slightly, "but I'll try. You're not wanted in this house, Mr. Morgan, now or at any other time. Perhaps you'll understand—this!"

And with the last word he closed the door in Eugene's face.

Then, not moving away, he stood just inside the door, and noted that the misty silhouette remained upon the frosted glass for several moments, as if the forbidden gentleman debated in his mind what course to pursue. "Let him ring again!" George thought grimly. "Or try the side door—or the kitchen!"

But Eugene made no further attempt; the silhouette disappeared; footsteps could be heard withdrawing across the floor of the veranda; and George, returning to the window in the "reception-room," was rewarded by the sight of an automobile manufacturer in baffled retreat, with all his wooing furs and fineries mocking him. Eugene got into his car slowly, not looking back at the house which had just taught him such a lesson; and it was easily visible—even from a window seventy feet distant—that he was not the same light suitor who had jumped so gallantly from the car only a few minutes earlier. Observing the heaviness of his movements as he climbed into the tonneau, George indulged in a sickish throat rumble which bore a distant cousinship to mirth.

The car was quicker than its owner; it shot away as soon as he had sunk into his seat; and George, having watched its

impetuous disappearance from his field of vision, ceased to haunt the window. He went to the library, and, seating himself beside the table whereon he had placed the photograph of his father, picked up a book, and pretended to be engaged in reading it.

Presently Isabel's buoyant step was heard descending the stairs, and her low, sweet whistling, renewing the air of "Lord Bateman." She came into the library, still whistling thoughtfully, a fur coat over her arm, ready to put on, and two veils round her small black hat, her right hand engaged in buttoning the glove upon her left; and, as the large room contained too many pieces of heavy furniture, and the inside shutters excluded most of the light of day, she did not at once perceive George's presence. Instead, she went to the bay window at the end of the room, which afforded a view of the street, and glanced out expectantly; then bent her attention upon her glove; after that, looked out toward the street again, ceased to whistle, and turned toward the interior of the room.

"Why, Georgie!"

She came, leaned over from behind him, and there was a faint, exquisite odour as from distant apple-blossoms as she kissed his cheek. "Dear, I waited lunch almost an hour for you, but you didn't come! Did you lunch out somewhere?"

"Yes." He did not look up from the book.

"Did you have plenty to eat?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure? Wouldn't you like to have Maggie get you something now in the dining-room? Or they could bring it to you here, if you think it would be cosier. Shan't I——"

"No."

A tinkling bell was audible, and she moved to the doorway into the hall. "I'm going out driving, dear. I——" She interrupted herself to address the housemaid, who was passing through the hall: "I think it's Mr. Morgan, Mary. Tell him I'll be there at once."

"Yes, ma'am."

Mary returned. "'Twas a pedlar, ma'am."

"Another one?" Isabel said, surprised. "I thought you said it was a pedlar when the bell rang a little while ago."

"Mister George said it was, ma'am; he went to the door," Mary informed her, disappearing.

"There seem to be a great many of them," Isabel mused. "What did yours want to sell, George?"

"He didn't say."

"You must have cut him off short!" she laughed; and then, still standing in the doorway, she noticed the big silver frame upon the table beside him. "Gracious, Georgie!" she exclaimed. "You *have* been investing!" and as she came across the room for a closer view, "Is it—is it Lucy?" she asked half timidly, half archly. But the next instant she saw whose likeness was thus set forth in elegiac splendour—and she was silent, except for a long, just-audible "*Oh!*"

He neither looked up nor moved.

"That was nice of you, Georgie," she said, in a low voice, presently. "I ought to have had it framed myself, when I gave it to you."

He said nothing, and, standing beside him, she put her hand gently upon his shoulder, then as gently withdrew it, and went out of the room. But she did not go upstairs; he heard the faint rustle of her dress in the hall, and then the sound of her footsteps in the "reception-room." After a time, silence succeeded even these slight tokens of her presence; whereupon George rose and went warily into the hall, taking care to make no noise, and he obtained an oblique view of her through the open double doors of the "reception-room." She was sitting in the chair which he had occupied so long; and she was looking out of the window expectantly—a little troubled.

He went back to the library, waited an interminable half hour, then returned noiselessly to the same position in the hall, where he could see her. She was still sitting patiently by the window.

Waiting for that man, was she? Well, it might be quite a long wait! And the grim George silently ascended the stairs to his own room, and began to pace his suffering floor.

CHAPTER XXV

HE LEFT his door open, however, and when he heard the front door-bell ring, by and by, he went halfway down the stairs and stood to listen. He was not much afraid that Morgan would return, but he wished to make sure.

Mary appeared in the hall below him, but, after a glance toward the front of the house, turned back, and withdrew. Evidently Isabel had gone to the door. Then a murmur was heard, and George Amberson's voice, quick and serious: "I want to talk to you, Isabel" . . . and another murmur; then Isabel and her brother passed the foot of the broad, dark stairway, but did not look up, and remained unconscious of the watchful presence above them. Isabel still carried her cloak upon her arm, but Amberson had taken her hand, and retained it; and as he led her silently into the library there was something about her attitude, and the pose of her slightly bent head, that was both startled and meek. Thus they quickly disappeared from George's sight, hand in hand; and Amberson at once closed the massive double doors of the library.

For a time all that George could hear was the indistinct sound of his uncle's voice: what he was saying could not be surmised, though the troubled brotherliness of his tone was evident. He seemed to be explaining something at considerable length, and there were moments when he paused, and George guessed that his mother was speaking, but her voice must have been very low, for it was entirely inaudible to him.

Suddenly he did hear her. Through the heavy doors her outcry came, clear and loud:

"Oh, *no!*"

It was a cry of protest, as if something her brother told her must be untrue, or, if it were true, the fact he stated must be undone; and it was a sound of sheer pain.

Another sound of pain, close to George, followed it; this was a vehement sniffling which broke out just above him, and, looking up, he saw Fanny Minafer on the landing, leaning over the banisters and applying her handkerchief to her eyes and nose.

"I can guess what *that* was about," she whispered huskily. "He's just told her what you did to Eugene!"

George gave her a dark look over his shoulder. "You go on back to your room!" he said; and he began to descend the stairs; but Fanny, guessing his purpose, rushed down and caught his arm, detaining him.

"You're not going in *there?*" she whispered huskily. "You don't——"

"Let go of me!"

But she clung to him savagely. "No, you don't, Georgie Minafer! You'll keep away from there! You will!"

"You let go of——"

"I won't! You come back here! You'll come upstairs and let them alone; that's what you'll do!" And with such passionate determination did she clutch and tug, never losing a grip of him somewhere, though George tried as much as he could, without hurting her, to wrench away—with such utter forgetfulness of her maiden dignity did she assault him, that she forced him, stumbling upward, to the landing.

"Of all the ridiculous——" he began furiously; but she spared one hand from its grasp of his sleeve and clapped it over his mouth.

"Hush up!" Never for an instant in this grotesque struggle did Fanny raise her voice above a husky whisper. "Hush up! It's indecent—like squabbling outside the door of an operating-room! Go on to the top of the stairs—go on!"

And when George had most unwillingly obeyed, she planted herself in his way, on the top step. "There!" she said. "The idea of your going in there now! I never heard of such a thing!" And with the sudden departure of the nervous vigour she had shown so amazingly, she began to cry again. "I was an *awful* fool! I thought you knew what was going on or I

never, never would have done it. Do you suppose I *dreamed* you'd go making everything into such a tragedy? Do you?"

"I don't care what you dreamed," George muttered.

But Fanny went on, always taking care to keep her voice from getting too loud, in spite of her most grievous agitation. "Do you dream I thought you'd go making such a fool of yourself at Mrs. Johnson's? Oh, I saw her this morning! She wouldn't talk to me, but I met George Amberson on my way back, and he told me what you'd done over there! And do you dream I thought you'd do what you've done here this afternoon to Eugene? Oh, I knew that, too! I was looking out of the front bedroom window, and I saw him drive up, and then go away again, and I knew you'd been to the door. Of course he went to George Amberson about it, and that's why George is here. He's got to tell Isabel the whole thing now, and you wanted to go in there interfering—God knows what! You stay here and let her brother tell her; he's got some consideration for her!"

"I suppose you think I haven't!" George said, challenging her, and at that Fanny laughed witheringly.

"You! Considerate of anybody!"

"I'm considerate of her good name!" he said hotly. "It seems to me that's about the first thing to be considerate of, in being considerate of a person! And look here: it strikes me you're taking a pretty different tack from what you did yesterday afternoon!"

Fanny wrung her hands. "I did a terrible thing!" she lamented. "Now that it's done and too late, I know what it *was!* I didn't have sense enough just to let things go on. I didn't have any business to interfere, and I didn't *mean* to interfere—I only wanted to talk, and let out a little! I did think you already knew everything I told you. I did! And I'd rather have cut my hand off than stir you up to doing what you *have* done! I was just suffering so that I wanted to let out a little—I didn't mean any real harm. But now I *see* what's happened—oh, I was a fool! I hadn't any business interfering. Eugene never would have looked at me, anyhow,

and, oh, why couldn't I have seen that before! He never came here a single time in his life except on her account, never! and I might have let them alone, because he wouldn't have looked at me even if he'd never seen Isabel. And they haven't done any harm: she made Wilbur happy, and she was a true wife to him as long as he lived. It wasn't a crime for her to care for Eugene all the time; she certainly never *told* him she did—and she gave me every chance in the world! She left us alone together every time she could—even since Wilbur died —but what was the use? And here I go, not doing myself a bit of good by it, and just"—Fanny wrung her hands again— "just ruining them!"

"I suppose you mean I'm doing that," George said bitterly.

"Yes, I do!" she sobbed, and drooped upon the stairway railing, exhausted.

"On the contrary, I mean to save my mother from a calamity."

Fanny looked at him wanly, in a tired despair; then she stepped by him and went slowly to her own door, where she paused and beckoned to him.

"What do you want?"

"Just come here a minute."

"What for?" he asked impatiently.

"I just wanted to say something to you."

"Well, for heaven's sake, say it! There's nobody to hear." Nevertheless, after a moment, as she beckoned him again, he went to her, profoundly annoyed. "Well, what is it?"

"George," she said in a low voice, "I think you ought to be told something. If I were you, I'd let my mother alone."

"Oh, my Lord!" he groaned. "I'm doing these things *for* her, not against her!"

A mildness had come upon Fanny, and she had controlled her weeping. She shook her head gently. "No, I'd let her alone if I were you. I don't think she's very well, George."

"She! I never saw a healthier person in my life."

"No. She doesn't let anybody know, but she goes to the doctor regularly."

"Women are always going to doctors regularly."

"No. He told her to."

George was not impressed. "It's nothing at all; she spoke of it to me years ago—some kind of family failing. She said grandfather had it, too; and look at him! Hasn't proved very serious with him! You act as if I'd done something wrong in sending that man about his business, and as if I were going to persecute my mother, instead of protecting her. By Jove, it's sickening! *You* told me how all the riffraff in town were busy with her name, and then the minute I lift my hand to protect her, you begin to attack me and——"

"*Sh!*" Fanny checked him, laying her hand on his arm. "Your uncle is going."

The library doors were heard opening, and a moment later there came the sound of the front door closing.

George moved toward the head of the stairs, then stood listening; but the house was silent.

Fanny made a slight noise with her lips to attract his attention, and, when he glanced toward her, shook her head at him urgently. "Let her alone," she whispered. "She's down there by herself. Don't go down. Let her alone."

She moved a few steps toward him and halted, her face pallid and awestruck, and then both stood listening for anything that might break the silence downstairs. No sound came to them; that poignant silence was continued throughout long, long minutes, while the two listeners stood there under its mysterious spell; and in its plaintive eloquence—speaking, as it did, of the figure alone in the big, dark library, where dead Wilbur's new silver frame gleamed in the dimness—there was something that checked even George.

Above the aunt and nephew, as they kept this strange vigil, there was a triple window of stained glass, to illumine the landing and upper reaches of the stairway. Figures in blue and amber garments posed gracefully in panels, conceived by some craftsman of the Eighties to represent Love and Purity and Beauty, and these figures, leaded to unalterable attitudes, were little more motionless than the two human beings upon

whom fell the mottled faint light of the window. The colours were growing dull; evening was coming on.

Fanny Minafer broke the long silence with a sound from her throat, a stifled gasp; and with that great companion of hers, her handkerchief, retired softly to the loneliness of her own chamber. After she had gone George looked about him bleakly, then on tiptoe crossed the hall and went into his own room, which was filled with twilight. Still tiptoeing, though he could not have said why, he went across the room and sat down heavily in a chair facing the window. Outside there was nothing but the darkening air and the wall of the nearest of the new houses. He had not slept at all, the night before, and he had eaten nothing since the preceding day at lunch, but he felt neither drowsiness nor hunger. His set determination filled him, kept him but too wide awake, and his gaze at the grayness beyond the window was wide-eyed and bitter.

Darkness had closed in when there was a step in the room behind him. Then someone knelt beside the chair, two arms went round him with infinite compassion, a gentle head rested against his shoulder, and there came the faint scent as of apple-blossoms far away.

"You mustn't be troubled, darling," his mother whispered.

CHAPTER XXVI

GEORGE choked. For an instant he was on the point of breaking down, but he commanded himself, bravely dismissing the self-pity roused by her compassion. "How can I help but be?" he said.

"No, no." She soothed him. "You mustn't. You mustn't be troubled, no matter what happens."

"That's easy enough to say!" he protested; and he moved as if to rise.

"Just let's stay like this a little while, dear. Just a minute or two. I want to tell you: brother George has been here, and he told me everything about—about how unhappy you'd been —and how you went so gallantly to that old woman with the opera-glasses." Isabel gave a sad little laugh. "What a terrible old woman she is! What a really terrible thing a vulgar old woman can be!"

"Mother, I——" And again he moved to rise.

"Must you? It seemed to me such a comfortable way to talk. Well——" She yielded; he rose, helped her to her feet, and pressed the light into being.

As the room took life from the sudden lines of fire within the bulbs Isabel made a deprecatory gesture, and, with a faint laugh of apologetic protest, turned quickly away from George. What she meant was: "You mustn't see my face until I've made it nicer for you." Then she turned again to him, her eyes downcast, but no sign of tears in them, and she contrived to show him that there was the semblance of a smile upon her lips. She still wore her hat, and in her unsteady fingers she held a white envelope, somewhat crumpled.

"Now, mother——"

"Wait, dearest," she said; and though he stood stone cold, she lifted her arms, put them round him again, and pressed her cheek lightly to his. "Oh, you do look so troubled, poor

dear! One thing you couldn't doubt, beloved boy: you know I could never care for anything in the world as I care for you —never, never!"

"Now, mother——"

She released him, and stepped back. "Just a moment more, dearest. I want you to read this first. We can get at things better." She pressed into his hand the envelope she had brought with her, and as he opened it, and began to read the long enclosure, she walked slowly to the other end of the room; then stood there, with her back to him, and her head drooping a little, until he had finished.

The sheets of paper were covered with Eugene's handwriting.

George Amberson will bring you this, dear Isabel. He is waiting while I write. He and I have talked things over, and before he gives this to you he will tell you what has happened. Of course I'm rather confused, and haven't had time to think matters out very definitely, and yet I believe I should have been better prepared for what took place to-day—I ought to have known it was coming, because I have understood for quite a long time that young George was getting to dislike me more and more. Somehow, I've never been able to get his friendship; he's always had a latent distrust of me—or something like distrust—and perhaps that's made me sometimes a little awkward and diffident with him. I think it may be he felt from the first that I cared a great deal about you, and he naturally resented it. I think perhaps he felt this even during all the time when I was so careful—at least I thought I was—not to show, even to you, how immensely I did care. And he may have feared that you were thinking too much about me—even when you weren't and only liked me as an old friend. It's perfectly comprehensible to me, also, that at his age one gets excited about gossip. Dear Isabel, what I'm trying to get at, in my confused way, is that you and I don't care about this nonsensical gossip, ourselves, at all. Yesterday I thought the time had come when I could ask you to marry me, and you were dear enough to tell me "sometime it might come to that." Well, you and I, left to ourselves, and knowing what we have been and what we are, we'd pay as much attention to "talk" as we would to any other kind of old cats' mewing! We'd not be very apt to let

such things keep us from the plenty of life we have left to us for making up to ourselves for old unhappinesses and mistakes. But now we're faced with—not the slander and not our own fear of it, because we haven't any, but someone else's fear of it—your son's. And, oh, dearest woman in the world, I know what your son is to you, and it frightens me! Let me explain a little: I don't think he'll change—at twenty-one or twenty-two so many things appear solid and permanent and terrible which forty sees are nothing but disappearing miasma. Forty can't *tell* twenty about this; that's the pity of it! Twenty can find out only by getting to be forty. And so we come to this, dear: Will you live your own life your way, or George's way? I'm going a little further, because it would be fatal not to be wholly frank now. George will act toward you only as your long worship of him, your sacrifices—all the unseen little ones every day since he was born—will make him act. Dear, it breaks my heart for you, but what you have to oppose now is the history of your own selfless and perfect motherhood. I remember saying once that what you worshipped in your son was the angel you saw in him—and I still believe that is true of every mother. But in a mother's worship she may not see that the Will in her son should not always be offered incense along with the angel. I grow sick with fear for you—for both you and me—when I think how the Will against us two has grown strong through the love you have given the angel —and how long your own sweet Will has served that other. Are you strong enough, Isabel? Can you make the fight? I promise you that if you will take heart for it, you will find so quickly that it has all amounted to nothing. You shall have happiness, and, in a little while, *only* happiness. You need only to write me a line—I can't come to your house—and tell me where you will meet me. We will come back in a month, and the angel in your son will bring him to you; I promise it. What is good in him will grow so fine, once you have beaten the turbulent Will—but it must be beaten!

Your brother, that good friend, is waiting with such patience; I should not keep him longer—and I am saying too much for wisdom, I fear. But, oh, my dear, won't you be strong—such a little short strength it would need! Don't strike my life down twice, dear —this time I've not deserved it.

EUGENE.

Concluding this missive, George tossed it abruptly from him so that one sheet fell upon his bed and the others upon

the floor; and at the faint noise of their falling Isabel came, and, kneeling, began to gather them up.

"Did you read it, dear?"

George's face was pale no longer, but pink with fury. "Yes, I did."

"All of it?" she asked gently, as she rose.

"Certainly!"

She did not look at him, but kept her eyes downcast upon the letter in her hands, tremulously rearranging the sheets in order as she spoke—and though she smiled, her smile was as tremulous as her hands. Nervousness and an irresistible timidity possessed her. "I—I wanted to say, George," she faltered. "I felt that if—if some day it *should* happen—I mean, if you came to feel differently about it, and Eugene and I—that is if we found that it seemed the most sensible thing to do—I was afraid you might think it would be a little queer about—Lucy. I mean if—if she were your step-sister. Of course, she'd not be even legally related to you, and if you—if you cared for her——"

Thus far she got stumblingly with what she wanted to say, while George watched her with a gaze that grew harder and hotter; but here he cut her off. "I have already given up all idea of Lucy," he said. "Naturally, I couldn't have treated her father as I deliberately did treat him—I could hardly have done that and expected his daughter ever to speak to me again."

Isabel gave a quick cry of compassion, but he allowed her no opportunity to speak. "You needn't think I'm making any particular sacrifice," he said sharply, "though I would, quickly enough, if I thought it necessary in a matter of honour like this. I *was* interested in her, and I could even say I did care for her; but she proved pretty satisfactorily that she cared little enough about me! She went away right in the midst of a—of a difference of opinion we were having; she didn't even let me know she was going, and never wrote a line to me, and then came back telling everybody she'd had 'a perfectly gorgeous time!' That's quite enough for me. I'm

not precisely the sort to arrange for that kind of thing to be done to me more than once! The truth is, we're not congenial and we'd found that much out, at least, before she left. We should never have been happy; she was 'superior' all the time, and critical of me—not very pleasant, that! I was disappointed in her, and I might as well say it. I don't think she has the very deepest nature in the world, and——"

But Isabel put her hand timidly on his arm. "Georgie, dear, this is only a quarrel: all young people have them before they get adjusted, and you mustn't let——"

"If you please!" he said emphatically, moving back from her. "This isn't that kind. It's all over, and I don't care to speak of it again. It's settled. Don't you understand?"

"But, dear——"

"No. I want to talk to you about this letter of her father's."

"Yes, dear, that's why——"

"It's simply the most offensive piece of writing that I've ever held in my hands!"

She stepped back from him, startled. "But, dear, I thought——"

"I can't understand your even showing me such a thing!" he cried. "How *did* you happen to bring it to me?"

"Your uncle thought I'd better. He thought it was the simplest thing to do, and he said that he'd suggested it to Eugene, and Eugene had agreed. They thought——"

"Yes!" George said bitterly. "I should like to hear what they thought!"

"They thought it would be the most straightforward thing."

George drew a long breath. "Well, what do *you* think, mother?"

"I thought it would be the simplest and most straightforward thing; I thought they were right."

"Very well! We'll agree it was simple and straightforward. Now, what do you think of that letter itself?"

She hesitated, looking away. "I—of course I don't agree with him in the way he speaks of you, dear—except about the

angel! I don't agree with some of the things he implies. You've always been unselfish—nobody knows that better than your mother. When Fanny was left with nothing, you were so quick and generous to give up what really should have come to you, and——"

"And yet," George broke in, "you see what he implies about me. Don't you think, really, that this was a pretty insulting letter for that man to be asking you to hand your son?"

"Oh, no!" she cried. "You can see how fair he means to be, and he didn't ask for me to give it to you. It was brother George who——"

"Never mind that, now! You say he tries to be fair, and yet do you suppose it ever occurs to him that I'm doing my simple duty? That I'm doing what my *father* would do if he were alive? That I'm doing what my father would ask me to do if he could speak from his grave out yonder? Do you suppose it ever occurs to that man for one minute that I'm *protecting* my mother?" George raised his voice, advancing upon the helpless lady fiercely; and she could only bend her head before him. "He talks about my 'Will'—how it must be beaten down; yes, and he asks my *mother* to do that little thing to please him! What for? *Why* does he want me 'beaten' by my mother? Because I'm trying to protect her name! He's got my mother's name bandied up and down the streets of this town till I can't *step* in those streets without wondering what every soul I meet is thinking of me and of my family, and now he wants you to marry him so that every gossip in town will say 'There! What did I tell you? I guess *that* proves it's true!' You can't get away from it; that's exactly what they'd say, and this man pretends he cares for you, and yet asks you to marry him and give them the *right* to say it. He says he and you don't care what they say, but I know better! He may not care—probably he's that kind—but you do. There never was an Amberson yet that would let the Amberson name go trailing in the dust like that! It's the proudest name in this town and it's going to stay the proudest; and I

tell you that's the deepest thing in my nature—not that I'd expect Eugene Morgan to understand—the very deepest thing in my nature is to protect that name, and to fight for it to the last breath when danger threatens it, as it does now —through my mother!" He turned from her, striding up and down and tossing his arms about, in a tumult of gesture. "I can't believe it of you, that you'd *think* of such a sacrilege! That's what it would be—sacrilege! When he talks about your unselfishness toward me, he's right—you have been unselfish and you have been a perfect mother. But what about him? Is it unselfish of him to want you to throw away your good name just to please him? That's all he asks of you—and to quit being my mother! Do you think I can believe you *really* care for him? I don't! You are my mother and you're an Amberson—and I believe you're too proud! You're too proud to care for a man who could write such a letter as that!" He stopped, faced her, and spoke with more self-control: "Well, what are you going to do about it, mother?"

George was right about his mother's being proud. And even when she laughed with a negro gardener, or even those few times in her life when people saw her weep, Isabel had a proud look—something that was independent and graceful and strong. But she did not have it now: she leaned against the wall, beside his dressing-table, and seemed beset with humility and with weakness. Her head drooped.

"What answer are you going to make to such a letter?" George demanded, like a judge on the bench.

"I—I don't quite know, dear," she murmured.

"You don't?" he cried. "You——"

"Wait," she begged him. "I'm so—confused."

"I want to know what you're going to write him. Do you think if you did what he wants you to I could bear to stay another day in this town, mother? Do you think I could ever bear even to see you again if you married him? I'd want to, but you surely know I just—couldn't!"

She made a futile gesture, and seemed to breathe with difficulty. "I—I wasn't—quite sure," she faltered, "about—

about it's being wise for us to be married—even before knowing how you feel about it. I wasn't even sure it was quite fair to—to Eugene. I have—I seem to have that family trouble—like father's—that I spoke to you about once." She managed a deprecatory little dry laugh. "Not that it amounts to much, but I wasn't at all sure that it would be fair to him. Marrying doesn't mean so much, after all—not at my age. It's enough to know that—that people think of you—and to see them. I thought we were all—oh, pretty happy the way things were, and I don't think it would mean giving up a great deal for him or me, either, if we just went on as we have been. I—I see him almost every day, and——"

"Mother!" George's voice was loud and stern. "Do you think you could go on seeing him after *this!*"

She had been talking helplessly enough before; her tone was little more broken now. "Not—not even—see him?"

"How could you?" George cried. "Mother, it seems to me that if he ever set foot in this house again—oh! I can't speak of it! *Could* you see him, knowing what talk it makes every time he turns into this street, and knowing what that means to me! Oh, I *don't* understand all this—I don't! If you'd told me, a year ago, that such things were going to happen, I'd have thought you were insane—and now I believe *I* am!"

Then, after a preliminary gesture of despair, as though he meant harm to the ceiling, he flung himself heavily, face downward, upon the bed. His anguish was none the less real for its vehemence; and the stricken lady came to him instantly and bent over him, once more enfolding him in her arms. She said nothing, but suddenly her tears fell upon his head; she saw them, and seemed to be startled.

"Oh, this won't do!" she said. "I've never let you see me cry before, except when your father died. I mustn't!"

And she ran from the room.

. . . A little while after she had gone, George rose and began solemnly to dress for dinner. At one stage of these conscientious proceedings he put on, temporarily, his long black velvet dressing-gown, and, happening to catch sight in his pier glass

of the picturesque and mediæval figure thus presented, he paused to regard it; and something profoundly theatrical in his nature came to the surface.

His lips moved; he whispered, half-aloud, some famous fragments:

> "'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black . . ."

For, in truth, the mirrored princely image, with hair dishevelled on the white brow, and the long tragic fall of black velvet from the shoulders, had brought about (in his thought, at least) some comparisons of his own times, so out of joint, with those of that other gentle prince and heir whose widowed mother was minded to marry again.

> "But I have that within which passeth show;
> These but the trappings and the suits of Woe."

Not less like Hamlet did he feel and look as he sat gauntly at the dinner-table with Fanny to partake of a meal throughout which neither spoke. Isabel had sent word "not to wait" for her, an injunction it was as well they obeyed, for she did not come at all. But with the renewal of sustenance furnished to his system, some relaxation must have occurred within the high-strung George. Dinner was not quite finished when, without warning, sleep hit him hard. His burning eyes could no longer restrain the lids above them; his head sagged beyond control; and he got to his feet, and went lurching upstairs, yawning with exhaustion. From the door of his room, which he closed mechanically, with his eyes shut, he went blindly to his bed, fell upon it soddenly, and slept—with his face full upturned to the light.

. . . It was after midnight when he woke, and the room was dark. He had not dreamed, but he woke with the sense that somebody or something had been with him while he slept—somebody or something infinitely compassionate; somebody

or something infinitely protective, that would let him come to no harm and to no grief.

He got up, and pressed the light on. Pinned to the cover of his dressing-table was a square envelope, with the words, "For you, dear," written in pencil upon it. But the message inside was in ink, a little smudged here and there.

I have been out to the mail-box, darling, with a letter I've written to Eugene, and he'll have it in the morning. It would be unfair not to let him know at once, and my decision could not change if I waited. It would always be the same. I think it is a little better for me to write to you, like this, instead of waiting till you wake up and then telling you, because I'm foolish and might cry again, and I took a vow once, long ago, that you should never see me cry. Not that I'll feel like crying when we talk things over to-morrow. I'll be "all right and fine" (as you say so often) by that time—don't fear. I think what makes me most ready to cry now is the thought of the terrible suffering in your poor face, and the unhappy knowledge that it is I, your mother, who put it there. It shall never come again! I love you better than anything and everything else on earth. God gave you to me—and oh! how thankful I have been every day of my life for that sacred gift—and nothing can ever come between me and God's gift. I cannot hurt you, and I cannot let you stay hurt as you have been—not another instant after you wake up, my darling boy! It is beyond my power. And Eugene was right—I know you couldn't change about this. Your suffering shows how deep-seated the feeling is within you. So I've written him just about what I think you would like me to—though I told him I would always be fond of him, and always his best friend, and I hoped his dearest friend. He'll understand about not seeing him. He'll understand that, though I didn't say it in so many words. You mustn't trouble about that—he'll understand. Good-night, my darling, my beloved, my beloved! You mustn't be troubled. I think I shouldn't mind anything very much so long as I have you "all to myself"—as people say—to make up for your long years away from me at college. We'll talk of what's best to do in the morning, shan't we? And for all this pain you'll forgive your loving and devoted mother.

ISABEL.

CHAPTER XXVII

HAVING finished some errands downtown, the next afternoon, George Amberson Minafer was walking up National Avenue on his homeward way when he saw in the distance, coming toward him, upon the same side of the street, the figure of a young lady—a figure just under the middle height, comely indeed, and to be mistaken for none other in the world—even at two hundred yards. To his sharp discomfiture his heart immediately forced upon him the consciousness of its acceleration; a sudden warmth about his neck made him aware that he had turned red, and then, departing, left him pale. For a panicky moment he thought of facing about in actual flight; he had little doubt that Lucy would meet him with no token of recognition, and all at once this probability struck him as unendurable. And if she did not speak, was it the proper part of chivalry to lift his hat and take the cut bareheaded? Or should the finer gentleman acquiesce in the lady's desire for no further acquaintance, and pass her with stony mien and eyes constrained forward? George was a young man badly flustered.

But the girl approaching him was unaware of his trepidation, being perhaps somewhat preoccupied with her own. She saw only that he was pale, and that his eyes were darkly circled. But here he was advantaged with her, for the finest touch to his good looks was given by this toning down; neither pallor nor dark circles detracting from them, but rather adding to them a melancholy favour of distinction. George had retained his mourning, a tribute completed down to the final details of black gloves and a polished ebony cane (which he would have been pained to name otherwise than as a "walking stick") and in the aura of this sombre elegance his straight figure and drawn face were not without a tristful and appealing dignity.

In everything outward he was cause enough for a girl's cheek to flush, her heart to beat faster, and her eyes to warm with the soft light that came into Lucy's now, whether she would or no. If his spirit had been what his looks proclaimed it, she would have rejoiced to let the light glow forth which now shone in spite of her. For a long time, thinking of that spirit of his, and what she felt it should be, she had a persistent sense: "It must be there!" but she had determined to believe this folly no longer. Nevertheless, when she met him at the Sharons', she had been far less calm than she seemed.

People speaking casually of Lucy were apt to define her as "a little beauty," a definition short of the mark. She was "a little beauty," but an independent, masterful, self-reliant little American, of whom her father's earlier gipsyings and her own sturdiness had made a woman ever since she was fifteen. But though she was the mistress of her own ways and no slave to any lamp save that of her own conscience, she had a weakness: she had fallen in love with George Amberson Minafer at first sight, and no matter how she disciplined herself, she had never been able to climb out. The thing had happened to her; that was all. George had looked just the way she had always wanted someone to look—the riskiest of all the moonshine ambushes wherein tricky romance snares credulous young love. But what was fatal to Lucy was that this thing having happened to her, she could not change it. No matter what she discovered in George's nature she was unable to take away what she had given him; and though she could think differently about him, she could not feel differently about him, for she was one of those too faithful victims of glamour. When she managed to keep the picture of George away from her mind's eye, she did well enough; but when she let him become visible, she could not choose but love what she disdained. She was a little angel who had fallen in love with high-handed Lucifer; quite an experience, and not apt to be soon succeeded by any falling in love with a tamer party—and the unhappy truth was that George did make better men

seem tame. But though she was a victim, she was a heroic one, anything but helpless.

As they drew nearer, George tried to prepare himself to meet her with some remnants of aplomb. He decided that he would keep on looking straight ahead, and lift his hand toward his hat at the very last moment when it would be possible for her to see him out of the corner of her eye: then when she thought it over later, she would not be sure whether he had saluted her or merely rubbed his forehead. And there was the added benefit that any third person who might chance to look from a window, or from a passing carriage, would not think that he was receiving a snub, because he did not intend to lift his hat, but, timing the gesture properly, would in fact actually rub his forehead. These were the hasty plans which occupied his thoughts until he was within about fifty feet of her—when he ceased to have either plans or thoughts. He had kept his eyes from looking full at her until then, and as he saw her, thus close at hand, and coming nearer, a regret that was dumbfounding took possession of him. For the first time he had the sense of having lost something of overwhelming importance.

Lucy did not keep to the right, but came straight to meet him, smiling, and with her hand offered to him.

"Why—you——" he stammered, as he took it. "Haven't you——" What he meant to say was, "Haven't you heard?"

"Haven't I what?" she asked; and he saw that Eugene had not yet told her.

"Nothing!" he gasped. "May I—may I turn and walk with you a little way?"

"Yes, indeed!" she said cordially.

He would not have altered what had been done: he was satisfied with all that—satisfied that it was right, and that his own course was right. But he began to perceive a striking inaccuracy in some remarks he had made to his mother. Now when he had put matters in such shape that even by the relinquishment of his "ideals of life" he could not have Lucy, knew that he could never have her, and knew that when

Eugene told her the history of yesterday he could not have a glance or word even friendly from her—now when he must in good truth "give up all idea of Lucy," he was amazed that he could have used such words as "no particular sacrifice," and believed them when he said them! She had looked never in his life so bewitchingly pretty as she did to-day; and as he walked beside her he was sure that she was the most exquisite thing in the world.

"Lucy," he said huskily, "I want to tell you something. Something that matters."

"I hope it's a lively something then," she said; and laughed. "Papa's been so glum to-day he's scarcely spoken to me. Your Uncle George Amberson came to see him an hour ago and they shut themselves up in the library, and your uncle looked as glum as papa. I'd be glad if you'll tell me a funny story, George."

"Well, it may seem one to you," he said bitterly. "Just to begin with: when you went away you didn't let me know; not even a word—not a line——"

Her manner persisted in being inconsequent. "Why, no," she said. "I just trotted off for some visits."

"Well, at least you might have——"

"Why, no," she said again briskly. "Don't you remember, George? We'd had a grand quarrel, and didn't speak to each other all the way home from a long, long drive! So, as we couldn't play together like good children, of course it was plain that we oughtn't to play at all."

"'Play!'" he cried.

"Yes. What I mean is that we'd come to the point where it was time to quit playing—well, what we were playing."

"At being lovers, you mean, don't you?"

"Something like that," she said lightly. "For us two, playing at being lovers was just the same as playing at cross-purposes. I had all the purposes, and that gave you all the crossness; things weren't getting along at all. It was absurd!"

"Well, have it your own way," he said. "It needn't have been absurd."

"No, it couldn't help but be!" she informed him cheerfully. "The way I am and the way you are, it couldn't ever be anything else. So what was the use?"

"I don't know," he sighed, and his sigh was abysmal. "But what I wanted to tell you is this: when you went away, you didn't let me know and didn't care how or when I heard it, but I'm not like that with you. This time, *I*'m going away. That's what I wanted to tell you. I'm going away to-morrow night—indefinitely."

She nodded sunnily. "That's nice for you. I hope you'll have ever so jolly a time, George."

"I don't expect to have a particularly 'jolly time.'"

"Well, then," she laughed, "if I were you I don't think I'd go."

It seemed impossible to impress this distracting creature, to make her serious. "Lucy," he said desperately, "this is our last walk together."

"Evidently!" she said. "If you're going away to-morrow night."

"Lucy—this may be the last time I'll see you—ever—ever in my life."

At that she looked at him quickly, across her shoulder, but she smiled as brightly as before, and with the same cordial inconsequence: "Oh, I can hardly think that!" she said. "And of course I'd be awfully sorry to think it. You're not moving away, are you, to live?"

"No."

"And even if you were, of course you'd be coming back to visit your relatives every now and then."

"I don't know when I'm coming back. Mother and I are starting to-morrow night for a trip around the world."

At this she did look thoughtful. "Your mother is going with you?"

"Good heavens!" he groaned. "Lucy, doesn't it make any difference to you that *I* am going?"

At this her cordial smile instantly appeared again. "Yes,

of course," she said. "I'm sure I'll miss you ever so much. Are you to be gone long?"

He stared at her wanly. "I told you indefinitely," he said. "We've made no plans—at all—for coming back."

"That does sound like a long trip!" she exclaimed admiringly. "Do you plan to be travelling all the time, or will you stay in some one place the greater part of it? I think it would be lovely to——"

"Lucy!"

He halted; and she stopped with him. They had come to a corner at the edge of the "business section" of the city, and people were everywhere about them, brushing against them, sometimes, in passing.

"I can't stand this," George said, in a low voice. "I'm just about ready to go in this drug-store here, and ask the clerk for something to keep me from dying in my tracks! It's quite a shock, you see, Lucy!"

"What is?"

"To find out certainly, at last, how deeply you've cared for me! To see how much difference this makes to you! By Jove, I *have* mattered to you!"

Her cordial smile was tempered now with good-nature. "George!" She laughed indulgently. "Surely you don't want me to do pathos on a downtown corner!"

"*You* wouldn't 'do pathos' anywhere!"

"Well—don't you think pathos is generally rather foozling?"

"I can't stand this any longer," he said. "I can't! Good-bye, Lucy!" He took her hand. "It's good-bye—I think it's good-bye for good, Lucy!"

"Good-bye! I do hope you'll have the most splendid trip." She gave his hand a cordial little grip, then released it lightly. "Give my love to your mother. Good-bye!"

He turned heavily away, and a moment later glanced back over his shoulder. She had not gone on, but stood watching him, that same casual, cordial smile on her face to the very

last; and now, as he looked back, she emphasized her friendly unconcern by waving her small hand to him cheerily, though perhaps with the slightest hint of preoccupation, as if she had begun to think of the errand that brought her downtown.

In his mind, George had already explained her to his own poignant dissatisfaction—some blond pup, probably, whom she had met during that "perfectly gorgeous time!" And he strode savagely onward, not looking back again.

But Lucy remained where she was until he was out of sight. Then she went slowly into the drug-store which had struck George as a possible source of stimulant for himself.

"Please let me have a few drops of aromatic spirits of ammonia in a glass of water," she said, with the utmost composure.

"Yes, *ma'am!*" said the impressionable clerk, who had been looking at her through the display window as she stood on the corner.

But a moment later, as he turned from the shelves of glass jars against the wall, with the potion she had asked for in his hand, he uttered an exclamation: "For goshes' sake, Miss!" And, describing this adventure to his fellow-boarders, that evening, "Sagged pretty near to the counter, she was," he said. "'F I hadn't been a bright, quick, ready-for-anything young fella she'd 'a' flummixed plum! I was watchin' her out the window—talkin' to some young s'iety fella, and she was all right then. She was all right when she come in the store, too. Yes, sir; the prettiest girl that ever walked in our place and took one good look at me. I reckon it must be the truth what some you town wags say about my face!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THAT hour the heroine of the susceptible clerk's romance was engaged in brightening the rosy little coal fire under the white mantelpiece in her pretty white-and-blue boudoir. Four photographs all framed in decorous plain silver went to the anthracite's fierce destruction—frames and all—and three packets of letters and notes in a charming Florentine treasure-box of painted wood; nor was the box, any more than the silver frames, spared this rousing finish. Thrown heartily upon live coal, the fine wood sparkled forth in stars, then burst into an alarming blaze which scorched the white mantelpiece, but Lucy stood and looked on without moving.

It was not Eugene who told her what had happened at Isabel's door. When she got home, she found Fanny Minafer waiting for her—a secret excursion of Fanny's for the purpose, presumably, of "letting out" again; because that was what she did. She told Lucy everything (except her own lamentable part in the production of the recent miseries) and concluded with a tribute to George: "The worst of it is, he thinks he's been such a hero, and Isabel does, too, and that makes him more than twice as awful. It's been the same all his life: everything he did was noble and perfect He had a domineering nature to begin with, and she let it go on, and fostered it till it absolutely ruled her. I never saw a plainer case of a person's fault making them pay for having it! She goes about, overseeing the packing and praising George and pretending to be perfectly cheerful about what he's making her do and about the dreadful things he's done She pretends he did such a fine thing—so manly and protective—going to Mrs. Johnson. And so heroic—doing what his 'principles' made him—even though he knew what it would cost him with you! And all the while it's almost killing her—what he said to your father!

She's always been lofty enough, so to speak, and had the greatest idea of the Ambersons being superior to the rest of the world, and all that, but rudeness, or anything like a 'scene,' or any bad manners—they always just made her sick! But she could never see what George's manners were—oh, it's been a terrible adulation! . . . It's going to be a task for me, living in that big house, all alone: you must come and see me —I mean after they've gone, of course. I'll go crazy if I don't see something of people. I'm sure you'll come as often as you can. I know you too well to think you'll be sensitive about coming there, or being reminded of George. Thank heaven you're too well-balanced," Miss Fanny concluded, with a profound fervour, "you're too well-balanced to let anything affect you deeply about that—that monkey!"

The four photographs and the painted Florentine box went to their cremation within the same hour that Miss Fanny spoke; and a little later Lucy called her father in, as he passed her door, and pointed to the blackened area on the underside of the mantelpiece, and to the burnt heap upon the coal, where some metallic shapes still retained outline. She flung her arms about his neck in passionate sympathy, telling him that she knew what had happened to him; and presently he began to comfort her and managed an embarrassed laugh.

"Well, well——" he said. "I was too old for such foolishness to be getting into my head, anyhow."

"No, no!" she sobbed. "And if you knew how I despise myself for—for ever having thought one instant about—oh, Miss Fanny called him the right name: that *monkey!* He is!"

"There, I think I agree with you," Eugene said grimly, and in his eyes there was a steady light of anger that was to last. "Yes, I think I agree with you about *that!*"

"There's only one thing to do with such a person," she said vehemently. "That's to put him out of our thoughts forever —*forever!*"

And yet, the next day, at six o'clock, which was the hour, Fanny had told her, when George and his mother were to leave upon their long journey, Lucy touched that scorched

place on her mantel with her hand just as the little clock above it struck. Then, after this odd, unconscious gesture, she went to a window and stood between the curtains, looking out into the cold November dusk; and in spite of every reasoning and reasonable power within her, a pain of loneliness struck through her heart. The dim street below her window, the dark houses across the way, the vague air itself—all looked empty, and cold and (most of all) uninteresting. Something more sombre than November dusk took the colour from them and gave them that air of desertion.

The light of her fire, flickering up behind her, showed suddenly a flying group of tiny snowflakes nearing the window-pane; and for an instant she felt the sensation of being dragged through a snowdrift under a broken cutter, with a boy's arms about her—an arrogant, handsome, too-conquering boy, who nevertheless did his best to get hurt himself, keeping her from any possible harm.

She shook the picture out of her eyes indignantly, then came and sat before her fire, and looked long and long at the blackened mantelpiece. She did not have the mantelpiece repainted—and, since she did not, might as well have kept his photographs. One forgets what made the scar upon his hand but not what made the scar upon his wall.

She played no *marche funèbre* upon her piano, even though Chopin's romantic lamentation was then at the top of nine-tenths of the music-racks in the country, American youth having recently discovered the distinguished congeniality between itself and this deathless bit of deathly gloom. She did not even play "Robin Adair"; she played "Bedelia" and all the new cake-walks, for she was her father's housekeeper, and rightly looked upon the office as being the same as that of his heart-keeper. Therefore it was her affair to keep both house and heart in what state of cheerfulness might be contrived. She made him "go out" more than ever; made him take her to all the gayeties of that winter, declining to go herself unless he took her, and, though Eugene danced no more, and quoted Shakespeare to prove all lightfoot caperings beneath the

dignity of his age, she broke his resolution for him at the New Year's Eve "Assembly" and half coaxed, half dragged him forth upon the floor, and made him dance the New Year in with her.

. . . New faces appeared at the dances of the winter; new faces had been appearing everywhere, for that matter, and familiar ones were disappearing, merged in the increasing crowd, or gone forever and missed a little and not long; for the town was growing and changing as it never had grown and changed before.

It was heaving up in the middle incredibly; it was spreading incredibly; and as it heaved and spread, it befouled itself and darkened its sky. Its boundary was mere shapelessness on the run; a raw, new house would appear on a country road; four or five others would presently be built at intervals between it and the outskirts of the town; the country road would turn into an asphalt street with a brick-faced drug-store and a frame grocery at a corner; then bungalows and six-room cottages would swiftly speckle the open green spaces—and a farm had become a suburb, which would immediately shoot out other suburbs into the country, on one side, and, on the other, join itself solidly to the city. You drove between pleasant fields and woodland groves one spring day; and in the autumn, passing over the same ground, you were warned off the tracks by an interurban trolley-car's gonging, and beheld, beyond cement sidewalks just dry, new house-owners busy "moving in." Gasoline and electricity were performing the miracles Eugene had predicted.

But another had prophesied more passionately—not as Eugene did, upon evidence and reason—but out of the new inspirational faith in Bigness that was growing to its climax in the land. The inner necessity for Giantism, the craving for it in the American heart, now manifested itself in works, and the city almost reached to the border of that "Ornaby Addition" Isabel had once thought part of the insanity of her friend's son, Dan Oliphant. This dreamer, the great prophet of his time, was now thought not so mad; and there were new

names that began to be lustrous "downtown"; one among them, Sheridan, being held of significance. Also, there were Kohns and Hensels and Komiskeys.

For there was a change in the citizenry itself. What was left of the patriotic old-stock generation that had fought the Civil War, and subsequently controlled politics, had become venerable and was little heeded. The descendants of the pioneers and early settlers were merging into the new crowd, becoming part of it, little to be distinguished from it. What happened to Boston and to Broadway happened in degree to the Midland city; the old stock became less and less typical, and of the grown people who called the place home, less than a third had been born in it. There was a German quarter; there was a Jewish quarter; there was a negro quarter—square miles of it—called "Bucktown"; there were many Irish neighbourhoods; and there were large settlements of Italians, and of Hungarians, and of Rumanians, and of Servians and other Balkan peoples. But not the emigrants, themselves, were the almost dominant type on the streets downtown. That type was the emigrant's prosperous offspring: descendant of the emigrations of the Seventies and Eighties and Nineties, those great folk-journeyings in search not so directly of freedom and democracy as of more money for the same labour. A new Midlander—in fact, a new American—was beginning dimly to emerge.

A new spirit of citizenship had already sharply defined itself. It was idealistic, and its ideals were expressed in the new kind of young men in business downtown. They were optimists—optimists to the point of belligerence—their motto being "Boost! Don't Knock!" And they were hustlers, believing in hustling and in honesty because both paid. They loved their city and worked for it with a plutonic energy which was always ardently vocal. They were viciously governed; but they sometimes went so far as to struggle for better government on account of the helpful effect of good government on the price of real estate and "betterment" generally; the politicians could not go too far with them, and knew it. The idealists

planned and strove and shouted that their city should become a better, better, and better city—and what they meant, when they used the word "better," was "more prosperous," and the core of their idealism was this: "The more prosperous my beloved city, the more prosperous beloved I!" They had one supreme theory: that the perfect beauty and happiness of cities and of human life were to be brought about by more factories; they had a mania for factories; there was nothing they would not do to cajole a factory away from another city; and they were never more piteously embittered than when another city cajoled one away from them.

What they meant by Prosperity was credit at the bank; but in exchange for this credit they got nothing that was not dirty, and, therefore, to a sane mind, valueless; since whatever was cleaned was dirty again before the cleaning was half done. For, as the town grew, it grew dirty with an incredible completeness. The idealists put up magnificent business buildings and boasted of them, but the buildings were begrimed before they were finished. They boasted of their libraries, of their monuments and statues; and poured soot on them. They boasted of their schools, but the schools were dirty, like the children within them. This was not the fault of the children or their mothers. It was the fault of the idealists, who said: "The more dirt, the more prosperity." They drew patriotic, optimistic breaths of the flying powdered filth of the streets, and took the foul and heavy smoke with gusto into the profundities of their lungs. "Boost! Don't knock!" they said. And every year or so they boomed a great Clean-Up Week, when everybody was supposed to get rid of the tin cans in his backyard.

They were happiest when the tearing down and building up were most riotous, and when new factory districts were thundering into life. In truth, the city came to be like the body of a great dirty man, skinned, to show his busy works, yet wearing a few barbaric ornaments; and such a figure, huge, carved, coloured, and discoloured, and set up in the market-place, would have done well enough as the god of the

new people. Such a god, Bigness, they had indeed made in their own image, as all peoples make the god they truly serve; though of course certain of the idealists went to church on Sunday, and there knelt to Another, considered to be impractical in business. But while the Growing went on, this god of their market-place was their true god, their familiar and spirit-control. They did not know that they were his helplessly obedient slaves, nor could they ever hope to realize their serfdom (as the first step toward becoming free men) until they should make the strange and hard discovery that matter should serve man's spirit.

"Prosperity" meant good credit at the bank, black lungs, and housewives' Purgatory. The women fought the dirt all they could; but if they let the air into their houses they let in the dirt. It shortened their lives, and kept them from the happiness of ever seeing anything white. And thus, as the city grew, the time came when Lucy, after a hard struggle, had to give up her blue-and-white curtains and her white walls. Indoors, she put everything into dull gray and brown, and outside had the little house painted the dark green nearest to black. Then she knew, of course, that everything was as dirty as ever, but was a little less distressed because it no longer looked so dirty as it was.

These were bad times for Amberson Addition. This quarter, already old, lay within a mile of the centre of the town; but business moved in other directions; and the Addition's share of Prosperity was only the smoke and dirt, with the bank credit left out. The owners of the original big houses nearest "downtown" sold them, or rented them to boarding-house keepers, and the tenants of the multitude of small houses moved "farther out" (where the smoke was thinner) or into apartment houses, which were built by dozens now. Cheaper tenants took their places, and the rents were lower and lower, and the houses shabbier and shabbier—for all these shabby houses, burning soft coal, did their best to help in the destruction of their own value. They helped to make the quarter so dingy and the air so foul to breathe that no one would live

there who had money enough to get "farther out" where there were glimpses of ungrayed sky and breaths of cleaner winds. And with the coming of the new speed, "farther out" was now as close to business as the Addition had been in the days of its prosperity. Distances had ceased to matter.

The five new houses, built so closely where had been the fine lawn of the Amberson Mansion, did not look new. When they were a year old they looked as old as they would ever look; and two of them were vacant, having never been rented, for the Major's mistake about apartment houses had been a disastrous one. "He guessed wrong," George Amberson said. "He guessed wrong at just the wrong time! Housekeeping in a house is harder than in an apartment; and where the smoke and dirt are as thick as they are in the Addition, women can't stand it. People were crazy for apartments—too bad he couldn't have seen it in time. Poor man! he digs away at his ledgers by his old gas drop-light lamp almost every night—he still refuses to let the Mansion be torn up for wiring, you know. But he had one painful satisfaction this spring: he got his taxes lowered!"

Amberson laughed ruefully, and Fanny Minafer asked how the Major could have managed such an economy. They were sitting upon the veranda at Isabel's one evening during the third summer of the absence of their nephew and his mother; and the conversation had turned toward Amberson finances.

"I said it was a '*painful* satisfaction,' Fanny," he explained. "The property has gone down in value, and they assessed it lower than they did fifteen years ago."

"But farther out——"

"Oh, yes, 'farther out'! Prices are magnificent 'farther out,' and farther in, too! We just happen to be the wrong spot, that's all. Not that I don't think something could be done if father would let me have a hand; but he won't. He can't, I suppose I ought to say. He's 'always done his own figuring,' he says; and it's his lifelong habit to keep his affairs and even his books, to himself, and just hand us out the money. Heaven knows he's done enough of that!"

He sighed; and both were silent, looking out at the long flares of the constantly passing automobile headlights, shifting in vast geometric demonstrations against the darkness. Now and then a bicycle wound its nervous way among these portents, or, at long intervals, a surrey or buggy plodded forlornly by.

"There seem to be so many ways of making money nowadays," Fanny said thoughtfully. "Every day I hear of a new fortune some person has got hold of, one way or another —nearly always it's somebody you never heard of. It doesn't seem all to be in just making motor cars; I hear there's a great deal in manufacturing these things that motor cars use—new inventions particularly. I met dear old Frank Bronson the other day, and he told me——"

"Oh, yes, even dear old Frank's got the fever," Amberson laughed. "He's as wild as Dan Oliphant, himself! He told me about this invention he's gone into, too. 'Millions in it!' Some new electric headlight better than anything yet—'every car in America can't *help* but have 'em,' and all that. He's putting half he's laid by into it, and the fact is, he almost talked me into getting father to 'finance me' enough for me to go into it. Poor father! he's financed me before! I suppose he would again if I had the heart to ask him; and this seems to be a good thing, though probably old Frank is a *little* too sanguine. At any rate, I've been thinking it over."

"So have I," Fanny admitted. "He seemed to be certain it would pay twenty-five per cent. the first year, and enormously more after that; and I'm only getting four on my little principal. People *are* making such enormous fortunes out of everything to do with motor cars, it does seem as if——" She paused. "Well, I told him I'd think it over seriously."

"We may turn out to be partners and millionaires then," Amberson laughed. "I thought I'd ask Eugene's advice."

"I wish you would," said Fanny. "He probably knows exactly how much profit there would be in this."

Eugene's advice was to "go slow": he thought electric

lights for automobiles were "coming—*some* day," but probably not until certain difficulties could be overcome. Altogether, he was discouraging, but by this time his two friends "had the fever" as thoroughly as old Frank Bronson himself had it; for they had been with Bronson to see the light working beautifully in a machine shop. They were already enthusiastic, and after asking Eugene's opinion they argued with him, telling him how they had seen with their own eyes that the difficulties he mentioned *had* been overcome. "Perfectly!" Fanny cried. "And if it worked in the shop it's bound to work any place else, isn't it?"

He would not agree that it was "bound to"—yet, being pressed, was driven to admit that "it *might*," and, retiring from what was developing into an oratorical contest, repeated a warning about not "putting too much into it."

George Amberson also laid stress on this caution later, though the Major had "financed him" again, and he was "going in." "You must be careful to leave yourself a 'margin of safety,' Fanny," he said. "I'm confident that is a pretty conservative investment of its kind, and all the chances are with us, but you must be careful to leave yourself enough to fall back on, in case anything *should* go wrong."

Fanny deceived him. In the impossible event of "anything going wrong" she would have enough left to "live on," she declared, and laughed excitedly, for she was having the best time that had come to her since Wilbur's death. Like so many women for whom money has always been provided without their understanding how, she was prepared to be a thorough and irresponsible plunger.

Amberson, in his wearier way, shared her excitement, and in the winter, when the exploiting company had been formed, and he brought Fanny her importantly engraved shares of stock, he reverted to his prediction of possibilities, made when they first spoke of the new light.

"We seem to be partners, all right," he laughed. "Now let's go ahead and be millionaires before Isabel and young George come home."

"When they come home!" she echoed sorrowfully—and it was a phrase which found an evasive echo in Isabel's letters. In these letters Isabel was always planning pleasant things that she and Fanny and the Major and George and "brother George" would do—when she and her son came home. "They'll find things pretty changed, I'm afraid," Fanny said. "If they ever do come home!"

Amberson went over, the next summer, and joined his sister and nephew in Paris, where they were living. "Isabel does want to come home," he told Fanny gravely, on the day of his return, in October. "She's wanted to for a long while—and she ought to come while she can stand the journey——" And he amplified this statement, leaving Fanny looking startled and solemn when Lucy came by to drive him out to dinner at the new house Eugene had just completed.

This was no white-and-blue cottage, but a great Georgian picture in brick, far north of Amberson Addition, with four acres of its own hedged land between it and its next neighbour; and Amberson laughed wistfully as they turned in between the stone and brick gate pillars, and rolled up the crushed stone driveway. "I wonder, Lucy, if history's going on forever repeating itself," he said. "I wonder if this town's going on building up things and rolling over them, as poor father once said it was rolling over his poor old heart. It looks like it: here's the Amberson Mansion again, only it's Georgian instead of nondescript Romanesque; but it's just the same Amberson Mansion that my father built long before you were born. The only difference is that it's your father who's built this one now. It's all the same, in the long run."

Lucy did not quite understand, but she laughed as a friend should, and, taking his arm, showed him through vasty rooms where ivory-panelled walls and trim window hangings were reflected dimly in dark, rugless floors, and the sparse furniture showed that Lucy had been "collecting" with a long purse. "By Jove!" he said. "You *have* been going it! Fanny tells me you had a great 'house-warming' dance, and you keep right

on being the belle of the ball, not any softer-hearted than you used to be. Fred Kinney's father says you've refused Fred so often that he got engaged to Janie Sharon just to prove that someone would have him in spite of his hair. Well, the material world do move, and you've got the new kind of house it moves into nowadays—if it has the new price! And even the grand old expanses of plate glass we used to be so proud of at the other Amberson Mansion—they've gone, too, with the crowded heavy gold and red stuff. Curious! *We've* still got the plate glass windows, though all we can see out of 'em is the smoke and the old Johnson house, which is a counter-jumper's boarding-house now, while you've got a view, and you cut it all up into little panes. Well, you're pretty refreshingly out of the smoke up here."

"Yes, for a while," Lucy laughed. "Until it comes and we have to move out farther."

"No, you'll stay here," he assured her. "It will be somebody else who'll move out farther."

He continued to talk of the house after Eugene arrived, and gave them no account of his journey until they had retired from the dinner-table to Eugene's library, a gray and shadowy room, where their coffee was brought. Then, equipped with a cigar, which seemed to occupy his attention, Amberson spoke in a casual tone of his sister and her son.

"I found Isabel as well as usual," he said, "only I'm afraid 'as usual' isn't particularly well. Sydney and Amelia had been up to Paris in the spring, but she hadn't seen them. Somebody told her they were there, it seems. They'd left Florence and were living in Rome; Amelia's become a Catholic and is said to give great sums to charity and to go about with the gentry in consequence, but Sydney's ailing and lives in a wheel-chair most of the time. It struck me Isabel ought to be doing the same thing."

He paused, bestowing minute care upon the removal of the little band from his cigar; and as he seemed to have concluded his narrative, Eugene spoke out of the shadow beyond

a heavily shaded lamp: "What do you mean by that?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, she's cheerful enough," said Amberson, still not looking at either his young hostess or her father. "At least," he added, "she manages to seem so. I'm afraid she hasn't been really well for several years. She isn't stout you know—she hasn't changed in looks much—and she seems rather alarmingly short of breath for a slender person. Father's been that way for years, of course; but never nearly so much as Isabel is now. Of course she makes nothing of it, but it seemed rather serious to me when I noticed she had to stop and rest twice to get up the one short flight of stairs in their two-floor apartment. I told her I thought she ought to make George let her come home."

"'Let her'?" Eugene repeated, in a low voice. "Does she want to?"

"She doesn't urge it. George seems to like the life there—in his grand, gloomy, and peculiar way; and of course she'll never change about being proud of him and all that—he's quite a swell. But in spite of anything she said, rather than because, I know she does indeed want to come. She'd like to be with father, of course; and I think she's—well, she intimated one day that she feared it might even happen that she wouldn't get to see him again. At the time I thought she referred to his age and feebleness, but on the boat, coming home, I remembered the little look of wistfulness, yet of resignation, with which she said it, and it struck me all at once that I'd been mistaken: I saw she was really thinking of her own state of health."

"I see," Eugene said, his voice even lower than it had been before. "And you say he won't 'let' her come home?"

Amberson laughed, but still continued to be interested in his cigar. "Oh, I don't think he uses force! He's very gentle with her. I doubt if the subject is mentioned between them, and yet—and yet, knowing my interesting nephew as you do, wouldn't you think that was about the way to put it?"

"Knowing him as I do—yes," said Eugene slowly. "Yes, I should think that was about the way to put it."

A murmur out of the shadows beyond him—a faint sound, musical and feminine, yet expressive of a notable intensity—seemed to indicate that Lucy was of the same opinion.

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CHAPTER XXIX

"LET her" was correct; but the time came—and it came in the spring of the next year—when it was no longer a question of George's letting his mother come home. He had to bring her, and to bring her quickly if she was to see her father again; and Amberson had been right: her danger of never seeing him again lay not in the Major's feebleness of heart but in her own. As it was, George telegraphed his uncle to have a wheeled chair at the station, for the journey had been disastrous, and to this hybrid vehicle, placed close to the car platform, her son carried her in his arms when she arrived. She was unable to speak, but patted her brother's and Fanny's hands and looked "very sweet," Fanny found the desperate courage to tell her. She was lifted from the chair into a carriage, and seemed a little stronger as they drove home; for once she took her hand from George's, and waved it feebly toward the carriage window.

"Changed," she whispered. "So changed."

"You mean the town," Amberson said. "You mean the old place is changed, don't you, dear?"

She smiled and moved her lips: "Yes."

"It'll change to a happier place, old dear," he said, "now that you're back in it, and going to get well again."

But she only looked at him wistfully, her eyes a little frightened.

When the carriage stopped, her son carried her into the house, and up the stairs to her own room, where a nurse was waiting; and he came out a moment later, as the doctor went in. At the end of the hall a stricken group was clustered: Amberson, and Fanny, and the Major. George, deathly pale and speechless, took his grandfather's hand, but the old gentleman did not seem to notice his action.

"When are they going to let me see my daughter?" he asked querulously. "They told me to keep out of the way while they carried her in, because it might upset her. I wish they'd let me go in and speak to my daughter. I think she wants to see me."

He was right—presently the doctor came out and beckoned to him; and the Major shuffled forward, leaning on a shaking cane; his figure, after all its years of proud soldierliness, had grown stooping at last, and his untrimmed white hair straggled over the back of his collar. He looked old—old and divested of the world—as he crept toward his daughter's room. Her voice was stronger, for the waiting group heard a low cry of tenderness and welcome as the old man reached the open doorway. Then the door was closed.

Fanny touched her nephew's arm. "George, you must need something to eat—I know she'd want you to. I've had things ready: I knew she'd want me to. You'd better go down to the dining-room: there's plenty on the table, waiting for you. She'd want you to eat something."

He turned a ghastly face to her, it was so panic-stricken. "I don't want anything to *eat!*" he said savagely. And he began to pace the floor, taking care not to go near Isabel's door, and that his footsteps were muffled by the long, thick hall rug. After a while he went to where Amberson, with folded arms and bowed head, had seated himself near the front window. "Uncle George," he said hoarsely. "I didn't——"

"Well?"

"Oh, my God, I didn't think this thing the matter with her could ever be serious! I——" He gasped "When that doctor I had meet us at the boat——" He could not go on.

Amberson only nodded his head, and did not otherwise change his attitude.

. . . Isabel lived through the night. At eleven o'clock Fanny came timidly to George in his room. "Eugene is here," she whispered. "He's downstairs. He wants——" She gulped. "He wants to know if he can't *see* her. I didn't

know what to say. I said I'd see. I didn't know—the doctor said——"

"The doctor said we 'must keep her peaceful,'" George said sharply. "Do you think that man's coming would be very soothing? My God, if it hadn't been for him this mightn't have happened: we could have gone on living here quietly, and—why, it would be like taking a stranger into her room! She hasn't even spoken of him more than twice in all the time we've been away. Doesn't he know how *sick* she is? You tell him the doctor said she had to be quiet and peaceful. That's what he did say, isn't it?"

Fanny acquiesced tearfully. "I'll tell him. I'll tell him the doctor said she was to be kept very quiet. I—I didn't know ——" And she pottered out.

An hour later the nurse appeared in George's doorway; she came noiselessly, and his back was toward her; but he jumped as if he had been shot, and his jaw fell, he so feared what she was going to say.

"She wants to see you."

The terrified mouth shut with a click; and he nodded and followed her; but she remained outside his mother's room while he went in.

Isabel's eyes were closed, and she did not open them or move her head, but she smiled and edged her hand toward him as he sat on a stool beside the bed. He took that slender, cold hand, and put it to his cheek.

"Darling, did you—get something to eat?" She could only whisper, slowly and with difficulty. It was as if Isabel herself were far away, and only able to signal what she wanted to say.

"Yes, mother."

"All you—needed?"

"Yes, mother."

She did not speak again for a time; then, "Are you sure you didn't—didn't catch cold—coming home?"

"I'm all right, mother."

"That's good. It's sweet—it's sweet——"

"What is, mother darling?"

"To feel—my hand on your cheek. I—I *can* feel it."

But this frightened him horribly—that she seemed so glad she could feel it, like a child proud of some miraculous seeming thing accomplished. It frightened him so that he could not speak, and he feared that she would know how he trembled; but she was unaware, and again was silent. Finally she spoke again:

"I wonder if—if Eugene and Lucy know that we've come —home."

"I'm sure they do."

"Has he—asked about me?"

"Yes, he was here."

"Has he—gone?"

"Yes, mother."

She sighed faintly. "I'd like——"

"What, mother?"

"I'd like to have—seen him." It was just audible, this little regretful murmur. Several minutes passed before there was another. "Just—just once," she whispered, and then was still.

She seemed to have fallen asleep, and George moved to go, but a faint pressure upon his fingers detained him, and he remained, with her hand still pressed against his cheek. After a while he made sure she was asleep, and moved again, to let the nurse come in, and this time there was no pressure of the fingers to keep him. She was not asleep, but, thinking that if he went he might get some rest, and be better prepared for what she knew was coming, she commanded those longing fingers of hers—and let him go.

He found the doctor standing with the nurse in the hall; and, telling them that his mother was drowsing now, George went back to his own room, where he was startled to find his grandfather lying on the bed, and his uncle leaning against the wall. They had gone home two hours before, and he did not know they had returned.

"The doctor thought we'd better come over," Amberson

said, then was silent, and George, shaking violently, sat down on the edge of the bed. His shaking continued, and from time to time he wiped heavy sweat from his forehead.

The hours passed, and sometimes the old man upon the bed would snore a little, stop suddenly, and move as if to rise, but George Amberson would set a hand upon his shoulder, and murmur a reassuring word or two. Now and then, either uncle or nephew would tiptoe into the hall and look toward Isabel's room, then come tiptoeing back, the other watching him haggardly.

Once George gasped defiantly: "That doctor in New York said she *might* get better! Don't you know he did? Don't you know he said she might?"

Amberson made no answer.

Dawn had been murking through the smoky windows, growing stronger for half an hour, when both men started violently at a sound in the hall; and the Major sat up on the bed, unchecked. It was the voice of the nurse speaking to Fanny Minafer, and the next moment, Fanny appeared in the doorway, making contorted efforts to speak.

Amberson said weakly: "Does she want us—to come in?"

But Fanny found her voice, and uttered a long, loud cry. She threw her arms about George, and sobbed in an agony of loss and compassion:

"She loved you!" she wailed. "She loved you! She loved you! Oh, how she did love you!"

Isabel had just left them.

CHAPTER XXX

MAJOR AMBERSON remained dry-eyed through the time that followed: he knew that this separation from his daughter would be short; that the separation which had preceded it was the long one. He worked at his ledgers no more under his old gas drop-light, but would sit all evening staring into the fire, in his bedroom, and not speaking unless someone asked him a question. He seemed almost unaware of what went on around him, and those who were with him thought him dazed by Isabel's death, guessing that he was lost in reminiscences and vague dreams. "Probably his mind is full of pictures of his youth, or the Civil War, and the days when he and mother were young married people and all of us children were jolly little things—and the city was a small town with one cobbled street and the others just dirt roads with board sidewalks." This was George Amberson's conjecture, and the others agreed; but they were mistaken. The Major was engaged in the profoundest thinking of his life. No business plans which had ever absorbed him could compare in momentousness with the plans that absorbed him now, for he had to plan how to enter the unknown country where he was not even sure of being recognized as an Amberson—not sure of anything, except that Isabel would help him if she could. His absorption produced the outward effect of reverie, but of course it was not. The Major was occupied with the first really important matter that had taken his attention since he came home invalided, after the Gettysburg compaign, and went into business; and he realized that everything which had worried him or delighted him during this lifetime between then and to-day—all his buying and building and trading and banking—that it all was trifling and waste beside what concerned him now.

He seldom went out of his room, and often left untouched the meals they brought to him there; and this neglect caused them to shake their heads mournfully, again mistaking for dazedness the profound concentration of his mind. Meanwhile, the life of the little bereft group still forlornly centring upon him began to pick up again, as life will, and to emerge from its own period of dazedness. It was not Isabel's father but her son who was really dazed.

A month after her death he walked abruptly into Fanny's room, one night, and found her at her desk, eagerly adding columns of figures with which she had covered several sheets of paper. This mathematical computation was concerned with her future income to be produced by the electric headlight, now just placed on the general market; but Fanny was ashamed to be discovered doing anything except mourning, and hastily pushed the sheets aside, even as she looked over her shoulder to greet her hollow-eyed visitor.

"George! You startled me."

"I beg your pardon for not knocking," he said huskily. "I didn't think."

She turned in her chair and looked at him solicitously. "Sit down, George, won't you?"

"No. I just wanted——"

"I could hear you walking up and down in your room," said Fanny. "You were doing it ever since dinner, and it seems to me you're at it almost every evening. I don't believe it's good for you—and I know it would worry your mother terribly if she——" Fanny hesitated.

"See here," George said, breathing fast, "I want to tell you once more that what I did was right. How could I have done anything else but what I did do?"

"About what, George?"

"About everything!" he exclaimed; and he became vehement. "I did the right thing, I tell you! In heaven's name, I'd like to know what else there was for anybody in my position to do! It would have been a dreadful thing for me to just let matters go on and not interfere—it would have

been terrible! What else on earth was there *for* me to do? I *had* to stop that talk, didn't I? Could a son do less than I did? Didn't it *cost* me something to do it? Lucy and I'd had a quarrel, but that would have come round in time—and it meant the end forever when I turned her father back from our door. I knew what it meant, yet I went ahead and did it because I knew it had to be done if the talk was to be stopped. I took mother away for the same reason. I knew that would help to stop it. And she was happy over there—she was perfectly happy. I tell you, I think she had a happy life, and that's my only consolation. She didn't live to be old; she was still beautiful and young looking; and I feel she'd rather have gone before she got old. She'd had a good husband, and all the comfort and luxury that anybody could have—and how could it be called anything but a happy life? She was always cheerful, and when I think of her I can always see her laughing—I can always hear that pretty laugh of hers. When I can keep my mind off of the trip home, and that last night, I *always* think of her gay and laughing. So how on earth *could* she have had anything but a happy life? People that aren't happy don't look cheerful all the time, do they? They look unhappy if they *are* unhappy; that's how they look! See here"—he faced her challengingly—"do *you* deny that I did the right thing?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to judge," Fanny said soothingly, for his voice and gesture both partook of wildness. "I know you think you did, George."

"'Think I did!'" he echoed violently. "My God in heaven!" And he began to walk up and down the floor. "What else *was* there to do? What *choice* did I have? Was there any other way of stopping the talk?" He stopped, close in front of her, gesticulating, his voice harsh and loud: "Don't you hear me? I'm asking you: Was there any other way on earth of protecting her from the talk?"

Miss Fanny looked away. "It died down before long, I think," she said nervously.

"*That* shows I was right, doesn't it?" he cried. "If I

hadn't acted as I did, that slanderous old Johnson woman would have kept on with her slanders—she'd *still* be——"

"No," Fanny interrupted. "She's dead. She dropped dead with apoplexy one day about six weeks after you left. I didn't mention it in my letters because I didn't want—I thought——"

"Well, the *other* people would have kept on, then. *They'd* have——"

"I don't know," said Fanny, still averting her troubled eyes. "Things are so changed here, George. The other people you speak of—one hardly knows what's become of them. Of course not a great many were doing the talking, and they—well, some of them are dead, and some might as well be—you never see them any more—and the rest, whoever they were, are probably so mixed in with the crowds of new people that seem never even to have heard of *us*—and I'm sure we certainly never heard of *them*—and people seem to forget things so soon—they seem to forget anything. You can't imagine how things have changed here!"

George gulped painfully before he could speak. "You—you mean to sit there and tell me that if I'd just let things go on—— Oh!" He swung away, walking the floor again. "I tell you I did the only right thing! If you don't think so, why in the name of heaven can't you say what *else* I should have done? It's easy enough to criticize, but the person who criticizes a man ought at least to tell him what *else* he should have done! You think I was wrong!"

"I'm not saying so," she said.

"You did at the time!" he cried. "You said enough then, I think! Well, what have you to say now, if you're so sure I was wrong?"

"Nothing, George."

"It's only because you're afraid to!" he said, and he went on with a sudden bitter divination: "You're reproaching yourself with what *you* had to do with all that; and you're trying to make up for it by doing and saying what you think mother would want you to, and you think I couldn't

stand it if I got to thinking I might have done differently. Oh, I know! That's exactly what's in your mind: you *do* think I was wrong! So does Uncle George. I challenged him about it the other day, and he answered just as you're answering—evaded, and tried to be gentle! I don't care to be handled with gloves! I tell you I was right, and I don't need any coddling by people that think I wasn't! And I suppose you believe I was wrong not to let Morgan see her that last night when he came here, and she—she was dying. If you do, why in the name of God did you come and ask *me? You* could have taken him in! She *did* want to see him. She——"

Miss Fanny looked startled. "You think——"

"She told me so!" And the tortured young man choked. "She said—'just once.' She said 'I'd like to have seen him—just once!' She meant—to tell him good-bye! *That's* what she meant! And you put this on me, too; you put this responsibility on me! But I tell you, and I told Uncle George, that the responsibility isn't *all* mine! If you were so sure I was wrong all the time—when I took her away, and when I turned Morgan out—if you were so sure, what did you let me do it for? You and Uncle George were grown people, both of you, weren't you? You were older than I, and if you were so sure you were *wiser* than I, why did you just stand around with your hands hanging down, and let me go ahead? You could have stopped it if it was wrong, couldn't you?"

Fanny shook her head. "No, George," she said slowly. "Nobody could have stopped you. You were too strong, and——"

"And what?" he demanded loudly.

"And she loved you—too well."

George stared at her hard, then his lower lip began to move convulsively, and he set his teeth upon it but could not check its frantic twitching.

He ran out of the room.

She sat still, listening. He had plunged into his mother's room, but no sound came to Fanny's ears after the sharp closing of the door; and presently she rose and stepped out

into the hall—but could hear nothing. The heavy black walnut door of Isabel's room, as Fanny's troubled eyes remained fixed upon it, seemed to become darker and vaguer; the polished wood took the distant ceiling light, at the end of the hall, in dim reflections which became mysterious; and to Fanny's disturbed mind the single sharp point of light on the bronze door-knob was like a continuous sharp cry in the stillness of night. What interview was sealed away from human eye and ear within the lonely darkness on the other side of that door—in that darkness where Isabel's own special chairs were, and her own special books, and the two great walnut wardrobes filled with her dresses and wraps? What tragic argument might be there vainly striving to confute the gentle dead? "In God's name, what else could I have done?" For his mother's immutable silence was surely answering him as Isabel in life would never have answered him, and he was beginning to understand how eloquent the dead can be. They cannot stop their eloquence, no matter how they have loved the living: they cannot choose. And so, no matter in what agony George should cry out, "What else could I have done?" and to the end of his life no matter how often he made that wild appeal, Isabel was doomed to answer him with the wistful, faint murmur:

"I'd like to have—seen him. Just—just once."

A cheerful darkey went by the house, loudly and tunelessly whistling some broken thoughts upon women, fried food and gin; then a group of high-school boys, returning homeward after important initiations, were heard skylarking along the sidewalk, rattling sticks on the fences, squawking hoarsely, and even attempting to sing in the shocking new voices of uncompleted adolescence. For no reason, and just as a poultry yard falls into causeless agitation, they stopped in front of the house, and for half an hour produced the effect of a noisy multitude in full riot.

To the woman standing upstairs in the hall, this was almost unbearable; and she felt that she would have to go down and call to them to stop; but she was too timid, and

after a time went back to her room, and sat at her desk again. She left the door open, and frequently glanced out into the hall, but gradually became once more absorbed in the figures which represented her prospective income from her great plunge in electric lights for automobiles. She did not hear George return to his own room.

. . . A superstitious person might have thought it unfortunate that her partner in this speculative industry (as in Wilbur's disastrous rolling-mills) was that charming but too haphazardous man of the world, George Amberson. He was one of those optimists who believe that if you put money into a great many enterprises one of them is sure to turn out a fortune, and therefore, in order to find the lucky one, it is only necessary to go into a large enough number of them. Altogether gallant in spirit, and beautifully game under catastrophe, he had gone into a great many, and the unanimity of their "bad luck," as he called it, gave him one claim to be a distinguished person, if he had no other. In business he was ill fated with a consistency which made him, in that alone, a remarkable man; and he declared, with some earnestness, that there was no accounting for it except by the fact that there had been so much good luck in his family before he was born that something had to balance it.

"You ought to have thought of my record and stayed out," he told Fanny, one day the next spring, when the affairs of the headlight company had begun to look discouraging. "I feel the old familiar sinking that's attended all my previous efforts to prove myself a business genius. I think it must be something like the feeling an aëronaut has when his balloon bursts, and, looking down, he sees below him the old home farm where he used to live—I mean the feeling he'd have just before he flattened out in that same old clay barnyard. Things do look bleak, and I'm only glad you didn't go into this confounded thing to the extent I did."

Miss Fanny grew pink. "But it *must* go right!" she protested. "We saw with our own eyes how perfectly it worked in the shop. The light was so bright no one could face it,

and so there *can't* be any reason for it not to work. It simply——"

"Oh, you're right about that," Amberson said. "It certainly was a perfect thing—in the shop! The only thing *we* didn't know was how fast an automobile had to go to keep the light going. It appears that this was a matter of some importance."

"Well, how fast *does* one have to——"

"To keep the light from going entirely out," he informed her with elaborate deliberation, "it is computed by those enthusiasts who have bought our product—and subsequently returned it to us and got their money back—they compute that a motor car must maintain a speed of twenty-five miles an hour, or else there won't be any light at all. To make the illumination bright enough to be noticed by an approaching automobile, they state the speed must be more than thirty miles an hour. At thirty-five, objects in the path of the light begin to become visible; at forty they are revealed distinctly; and at fifty and above we have a real headlight. Unfortunately many people don't care to drive that fast at all times after dusk, especially in the traffic, or where policemen are likely to become objectionable."

"But think of that test on the road when we——"

"That test was lovely," he admitted. "The inventor made us happy with his oratory, and you and Frank Bronson and I went whirling through the night at a speed that thrilled us. It was an intoxicating sensation: we were intoxicated by the lights, the lights and the music. We must never forget that drive, with the cool wind kissing our cheeks and the road lit up for miles ahead. We must never forget it—and we never shall. It cost——"

"But something's got to be done."

"It has, indeed! *My* something would seem to be leaving my watch at my uncle's. Luckily, you——"

The pink of Fanny's cheeks became deeper. "But isn't that man going to *do* anything to remedy it? Can't he try to——"

"He can try," said Amberson. "He *is* trying, in fact. I've sat in the shop watching him try for several beautiful afternoons, while outside the windows all Nature was fragrant with spring and smoke. He hums ragtime to himself as he tries, and I think his mind is wandering to something else less tedious—to some new invention in which he'd take more interest."

"But you mustn't let him," she cried. "You must *make* him keep on trying!"

"Oh, yes. He understands that's what I sit there for. I'll keep sitting!"

However, in spite of the time he spent sitting in the shop, worrying the inventor of the fractious light, Amberson found opportunity to worry himself about another matter of business. This was the settlement of Isabel's estate.

"It's curious about the deed to her house," he said to his nephew. "You're absolutely sure it wasn't among her papers?"

"Mother didn't have any papers," George told him. "None at all. All she ever had to do with business was to deposit the cheques grandfather gave her and then write her own cheques against them."

"The deed to the house was never recorded," Amberson said thoughtfully. "I've been over to the courthouse to see. I asked father if he never gave her one, and he didn't seem able to understand me at first. Then he finally said he thought he must have given her a deed long ago; but he wasn't sure. I rather think he never did. I think it would be just as well to get him to execute one now in your favour. I'll speak to him about it."

George sighed. "I don't think I'd bother him about it: the house is mine, and you and I understand that it is. That's enough for me, and there isn't likely to be much trouble between you and me when we come to settling poor grandfather's estate. I've just been with him, and I think it would only confuse him for you to speak to him about it again. I notice he seems distressed if anybody tries to get

his attention—he's a long way off, somewhere, and he likes to stay that way. I think—I think mother wouldn't want us to bother him about it; I'm sure she'd tell us to let him alone. He looks so white and queer."

Amberson shook his head. "Not much whiter and queerer than you do, young fellow! You'd better begin to get some air and exercise and quit hanging about in the house all day. I won't bother him any more than I can help; but I'll have the deed made out ready for his signature."

"I wouldn't bother him at all. I don't see——"

"You might see," said his uncle uneasily. "The estate is just about as involved and mixed-up as an estate can well get, to the best of my knowledge; and I haven't helped it any by what he let me have for this infernal headlight scheme which has finally gone trolloping forever to where the woodbine twineth. Leaves me flat, and poor old Frank Bronson just half flat, and Fanny—well, thank heaven! I kept her from going in so deep that it would leave *her* flat. It's rough on her as it is, I suspect. You ought to have that deed."

"No. Don't bother him."

"I'll bother him as little as possible. I'll wait till some day when he seems to brighten up a little."

But Amberson waited too long. The Major had already taken eleven months since his daughter's death to think important things out. He had got as far with them as he could, and there was nothing to detain him longer in the world. One evening his grandson sat with him—the Major seemed to like best to have young George with him, so far as they were able to guess his preferences—and the old gentleman made a queer gesture: he slapped his knee as if he had made a sudden discovery, or else remembered that he had forgotten something.

George looked at him with an air of inquiry, but said nothing. He had grown to be almost as silent as his grandfather. However, the Major spoke without being questioned.

"It must be in the sun," he said. "There wasn't anything here but the sun in the first place, and the earth came out

of the sun, and we came out of the earth. So, whatever we are, we must have been in the sun. We go back to the earth we came out of, so the earth will go back to the sun that it came out of. And time means nothing—nothing at all—so in a little while we'll all be back in the sun together. I wish——"

He moved his hand uncertainly as if reaching for something, and George jumped up. "Did you want anything, grandfather?"

"What?"

"Would you like a glass of water?"

"No—no. No; I don't want anything." The reaching hand dropped back upon the arm of his chair, and he relapsed into silence; but a few minutes later he finished the sentence he had begun:

"I wish—somebody could tell me!"

The next day he had a slight cold, but he seemed annoyed when his son suggested calling the doctor, and Amberson let him have his own way so far, in fact, that after he had got up and dressed, the following morning, he was all alone when he went away to find out what he hadn't been able to think out—all those things he had wished "somebody" would tell him.

Old Sam, shuffling in with the breakfast tray, found the Major in his accustomed easy-chair by the fireplace—and yet even the old darkey could see instantly that the Major was not there.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHEN the great Amberson Estate went into court for settlement, "there wasn't any," George Amberson said—that is, when the settlement was concluded there was no estate. "I guessed it," Amberson went on. "As an expert on prosperity, my career is disreputable, but as a prophet of calamity I deserve a testimonial banquet." He reproached himself bitterly for not having long ago discovered that his father had never given Isabel a deed to her house. "And those pigs, Sydney and Amelia!" he added, for this was another thing he was bitter about. "They won't do anything. I'm sorry I gave them the opportunity of making a polished refusal. Amelia's letter was about half in Italian; she couldn't remember enough ways of saying no in English. One has to live quite a long while to realize there *are* people like that! The estate was badly crippled, even before they took out their 'third,' and the 'third' they took was the only good part of the rotten apple. Well, I didn't ask them for restitution on my own account, and at least it will save *you* some trouble, young George. Never waste any time writing to them; you mustn't count on them."

"I don't," George said quietly. "I don't count on anything."

"Oh, we'll not feel that things are quite desperate," Amberson laughed, but not with great cheerfulness. "We'll survive, Georgie—*you* will, especially. For my part I'm a little too old and too accustomed to fall back on somebody else for supplies to start a big fight with life: I'll be content with just surviving, and I can do it on an eighteen-hundred-dollar-a-year consulship. An ex-congressman can always be pretty sure of getting some such job, and I hear from Washington the matter's about settled. I'll live pleasantly enough with a pitcher of ice under a palm tree, and black folks to

wait on me—that part of it will be like home—and I'll manage to send you fifty dollars every now and then, after I once get settled. So much for me! But you—of course you've had a poor training for making your own way, but you're only a boy after all, and the stuff of the old stock is in you. It'll come out and do something. I'll never forgive myself about that deed: it would have given you something substantial to start with. Still, you have a little tiny bit, and you'll have a little tiny salary, too; and of course your Aunt Fanny's here, and she's got something you can fall back on if you get *too* pinched, until I can begin to send you a dribble now and then."

George's "little tiny bit" was six hundred dollars which had come to him from the sale of his mother's furniture; and the "little tiny salary" was eight dollars a week which old Frank Bronson was to pay him for services as a clerk and student-at-law. Old Frank would have offered more to the Major's grandson, but since the death of that best of clients and his own experience with automobile headlights, he was not certain of being able to pay more and at the same time settle his own small bills for board and lodging. George had accepted haughtily, and thereby removed a burden from his uncle's mind.

Amberson himself, however, had not even a "tiny bit"; though he got his consular appointment; and to take him to his post he found it necessary to borrow two hundred of his nephew's six hundred dollars. "It makes me sick, George," he said. "But I'd better get there and get that salary started. Of course Eugene would do anything in the world, and the fact is he wanted to, but I felt that—ah—under the circumstances——"

"Never!" George exclaimed, growing red. "I can't imagine one of the family——" He paused, not finding it necessary to explain that "the family" shouldn't turn a man from the door and then accept favours from him. "I wish you'd take more."

Amberson declined. "One thing I'll say for you, young

George; you haven't a stingy bone in your body. That's the Amberson stock in you—and I like it!"

He added something to this praise of his nephew on the day he left for Washington. He was not to return, but to set forth from the capital on the long journey to his post. George went with him to the station, and their farewell was lengthened by the train's being several minutes late.

"I may not see you again, Georgie," Amberson said; and his voice was a little husky as he set a kind hand on the young man's shoulder. "It's quite probable that from this time on we'll only know each other by letter—until you're notified as my next of kin that there's an old valise to be forwarded to you, and perhaps some dusty curios from the consulate mantelpiece. Well, it's an odd way for us to be saying good-bye; one wouldn't have thought it, even a few years ago, but here we are, two gentlemen of elegant appearance in a state of bustitude. We can't ever tell what will happen at all, can we? Once I stood where we're standing now, to say good-bye to a pretty girl—only it was in the old station before this was built, and we called it the 'dépôt.' She'd been visiting your mother, before Isabel was married, and I was wild about her, and she admitted she didn't mind that. In fact, we decided we couldn't live without each other, and we were to be married. But she had to go abroad first with her father, and when we came to say good-bye we knew we wouldn't see each other again for almost a year. I thought I couldn't live through it—and she stood here crying. Well, I don't even know where she lives now, or if she *is* living—and I only happen to think of her sometimes when I'm here at the station waiting for a train. If she ever thinks of me she probably imagines I'm still dancing in the ballroom at the Amberson Mansion, and she probably thinks of the Mansion as still beautiful—still the finest house in town. Life and money both behave like loose quicksilver in a nest of cracks. And when they're gone we can't tell where—or what the devil we did with 'em! But I believe I'll say now—while there isn't much time left for either of us to get embarrassed

about it—I believe I'll say that I've always been fond of you, Georgie, but I can't say that I always liked you. Sometimes I've felt you were distinctly *not* an acquired taste. Until lately, one had to be fond of you just *naturally*—this isn't very 'tactful,' of course—for if he didn't, well, he wouldn't! We all spoiled you terribly when you were a little boy and let you grow up *en prince*—and I must say you took to it! But you've received a pretty heavy jolt, and I had enough of your disposition, myself, at your age, to understand a little of what cocksure youth has to go through inside when it finds that it *can* make terrible mistakes. Poor old fellow! You get both kinds of jolts together, spiritual and material—and you've taken them pretty quietly and—well, with my train coming into the shed, you'll forgive me for saying that there have been times when I thought you ought to be hanged—but I've always been fond of you, and now I *like* you! And just for a last word: there may be somebody else in this town who's always felt about you like that—fond of you, I mean, no matter how much it seemed you ought to be hanged. You might try—— Hello, I must run. I'll send back the money as fast as they pay me—so, goodbye and God bless you, Georgie!"

He passed through the gates, waved his hat cheerily from the other side of the iron screen, and was lost from sight in the hurrying crowd. And as he disappeared, an unexpected poignant loneliness fell upon his nephew so heavily and so suddenly that he had no energy to recoil from the shock. It seemed to him that the last fragment of his familiar world had disappeared, leaving him all alone forever.

He walked homeward slowly through what appeared to be the strange streets of a strange city; and, as a matter of fact, the city was strange to him. He had seen little of it during his years in college, and then had followed the long absence and his tragic return. Since that he had been "scarcely outdoors at all," as Fanny complained, warning him that his health would suffer, and he had been downtown only in a closed carriage. He had not realized the great change.

The streets were thunderous; a vast energy heaved under the universal coating of dinginess. George walked through the begrimed crowds of hurrying strangers and saw no face that he remembered. Great numbers of the faces were even of a kind he did not remember ever to have seen; they were partly like the old type that his boyhood knew, and partly like types he knew abroad. He saw German eyes with American wrinkles at their corners; he saw Irish eyes and Neapolitan eyes, Roman eyes, Tuscan eyes, eyes of Lombardy, of Savoy, Hungarian eyes, Balkan eyes, Scandinavian eyes—all with a queer American look in them. He saw Jews who had been German Jews, Jews who had been Russian Jews, Jews who had been Polish Jews but were no longer German or Russian or Polish Jews. All the people were soiled by the smoke-mist through which they hurried, under the heavy sky that hung close upon the new skyscrapers; and nearly all seemed harried by something impending, though here and there a woman with bundles would be laughing to a companion about some adventure of the department stores, or perhaps an escape from the charging traffic of the streets—and not infrequently a girl, or a free-and-easy young matron, found time to throw an encouraging look to George.

He took no note of these, and, leaving the crowded sidewalks, turned north into National Avenue, and presently reached the quieter but no less begrimed region of smaller shops and old-fashioned houses. Those latter had been the homes of his boyhood playmates; old friends of his grandfather had lived here;—in this alley he had fought with two boys at the same time, and whipped them; in that front yard he had been successfully teased into temporary insanity by a Sunday-school class of pinky little girls. On that sagging porch a laughing woman had fed him and other boys with doughnuts and gingerbread; yonder he saw the staggered relics of the iron picket fence he had made his white pony jump, on a dare, and in the shabby, stone-faced house behind the fence he had gone to children's parties, and, when

he was a little older he had danced there often, and fallen in love with Mary Sharon, and kissed her, apparently by force, under the stairs in the hall. The double front doors, of meaninglessly carved walnut, once so glossily varnished, had been painted smoke gray, but the smoke grime showed repulsively, even on the smoke gray; and over the doors a smoked sign proclaimed the place to be a "Stag Hotel."

Other houses had become boarding-houses too genteel for signs, but many were franker, some offering "board by the day, week or meal," and some, more laconic, contenting themselves with the label: "Rooms." One, having torn out part of an old stone-trimmed bay window for purposes of commercial display, showed forth two suspended petticoats and a pair of oyster-coloured flannel trousers to prove the claims of its black-and-gilt sign: "French Cleaning and Dye House." Its next neighbour also sported a remodelled front and permitted no doubt that its mission in life was to attend cosily upon death. "J. M. Rolsener. Caskets. The Funeral Home." And beyond that, a plain old honest four-square gray-painted brick house was flamboyantly decorated with a great gilt scroll on the railing of the old-fashioned veranda: "Mutual Benev't Order Cavaliers and Dames of Purity." This was the old Minafer house.

George passed it without perceptibly wincing; in fact, he held his head up, and except for his gravity of countenance and the prison pallor he had acquired by too constantly remaining indoors, there was little to warn an acquaintance that he was not precisely the same George Amberson Minafer known aforetime. He was still so magnificent, indeed, that there came to his ears a waft of comment from a passing automobile. This was a fearsome red car, glittering in brass, with half-a-dozen young people in it whose motorism had reached an extreme manifestation in dress. The ladies of this party were favourably affected at sight of the pedestrian upon the sidewalk, and, as the machine was moving slowly, and close to the curb, they had time to observe him in detail, which they did with a frankness not pleasing to the object

of their attentions. "One sees so many nice-looking people one doesn't know nowadays," said the youngest of the young ladies. "This old town of ours is really getting enormous. I shouldn't mind knowing who he is."

"*I* don't know," the youth beside her said, loudly enough to be heard at a considerable distance. "I don't know who he is, but from his looks I know who he thinks he is: he thinks he's the Grand Duke Cuthbert!" There was a burst of tittering as the car gathered speed and rolled away, with the girl continuing to look back until her scandalized companions forced her to turn by pulling her hood over her face. She made an impression upon George, so deep a one, in fact, that he unconsciously put his emotion into a muttered word:

"Riffraff!"

This was the last "walk home" he was ever to take by the route he was now following: up National Avenue to Amberson Addition and the two big old houses at the foot of Amberson Boulevard; for to-night would be the last night that he and Fanny were to spend in the house which the Major had forgotten to deed to Isabel. To-morrow they were to "move out," and George was to begin his work in Bronson's office. He had not come to this collapse without a fierce struggle—but the struggle was inward, and the rolling world was not agitated by it, and rolled calmly on. For of all the "ideals of life" which the world, in its rolling, inconsiderately flattens out to nothingness, the least likely to retain a profile is that ideal which depends upon inheriting money. George Amberson, in spite of his record of failures in business, had spoken shrewdly when he realized at last that money, like life, was "like quicksilver in a nest of cracks." And his nephew had the awakening experience of seeing the great Amberson Estate vanishing into such a nest—in a twinkling, it seemed, now that it was indeed so utterly vanished.

His uncle had suggested that he might write to college friends; perhaps they could help him to something better than the prospect offered by Bronson's office; but George flushed and shook his head, without explaining. In that

small and quietly superior "crowd" of his he had too emphatically supported the ideal of being rather than doing. He could not appeal to one of its members now to help him to a job. Besides, they were not precisely the warmest-hearted crew in the world, and he had long ago dropped the last affectation of a correspondence with any of them. He was as aloof from any survival of intimacy with his boyhood friends in the city, and, in truth, had lost track of most of them. "The Friends of the Ace," once bound by oath to succour one another in peril or poverty, were long ago dispersed; one or two had died; one or two had gone to live elsewhere; the others were disappeared into the smoky bigness of the heavy city. Of the brethren, there remained within his present cognizance only his old enemy, the red-haired Kinney, now married to Janie Sharon, and Charlie Johnson, who, out of deference to his mother's memory, had passed the Amberson Mansion one day, when George stood upon the front steps, and, looking in fiercely, had looked away with continued fierceness—his only token of recognition.

. . . On this last homeward walk of his, when George reached the entrance to Amberson Addition—that is, when he came to where the entrance had formerly been—he gave a little start, and halted for a moment to stare. This was the first time he had noticed that the stone pillars, marking the entrance, had been removed. Then he realized that for a long time he had been conscious of a queerness about this corner without being aware of what made the difference. National Avenue met Amberson Boulevard here at an obtuse angle, and the removal of the pillars made the Boulevard seem a cross-street of no overpowering importance—certainly it did not seem to be a boulevard!

At the next corner Neptune's Fountain remained, and one could still determine with accuracy what its designer's intentions had been. It stood in sore need of just one last kindness; and if the thing had possessed any friends they would have done that doleful shovelling after dark.

George did not let his eyes linger upon the relic; nor did he look steadfastly at the Amberson Mansion. Massive as the old house was, it managed to look gaunt: its windows stared with the skull emptiness of all windows in empty houses that are to be lived in no more. Of course the rowdy boys of the neighbourhood had been at work; many of these haggard windows were broken; the front door stood ajar, forced open; and idiot salacity, in white chalk, was smeared everywhere upon the pillars and stone-work of the verandas.

George walked by the Mansion hurriedly, and came home to his mother's house for the last time.

Emptiness was there, too, and the closing of the door resounded through bare rooms; for downstairs there was no furniture in the house except a kitchen table in the dining-room, which Fanny had kept "for dinner," she said, though as she was to cook and serve that meal herself George had his doubts about her name for it. Upstairs, she had retained her own furniture, and George had been living in his mother's room, having sent everything from his own to the auction. Isabel's room was still as it had been, but the furniture would be moved with Fanny's to new quarters in the morning. Fanny had made plans for her nephew as well as herself; she had found a "three-room kitchenette apartment" in an apartment house where several old friends of hers had established themselves—elderly widows of citizens once "prominent" and other retired gentry. People used their own "kitchenettes" for breakfast and lunch, but there was a table-d'hôte arrangement for dinner on the ground floor; and after dinner bridge was played all evening, an attraction powerful with Fanny. She had "made all the arrangements," she reported, and nervously appealed for approval, asking if she hadn't shown herself "pretty practical" in such matters. George acquiesced absent-mindedly, not thinking of what she said and not realizing to what it committed him.

He began to realize it now, as he wandered about the dismantled house; he was far from sure that he was willing to

go and live in a "three-room apartment" with Fanny and eat breakfast and lunch with her (prepared by herself in the "kitchenette") and dinner at the table d'hôte in "such a pretty Colonial dining-room" (so Fanny described it) at a little round table they would have all to themselves in the midst of a dozen little round tables which other relics of disrupted families would have all to themselves. For the first time, now that the change was imminent, George began to develop before his mind's eye pictures of what he was in for; and they appalled him. He decided that such a life verged upon the sheerly unbearable, and that after all there were some things left that he just couldn't stand. So he made up his mind to speak to his aunt about it at "dinner," and tell her that he preferred to ask Bronson to let him put a sofa-bed, a trunk, and a folding rubber bathtub behind a screen in the dark rear room of the office. George felt that this would be infinitely more tolerable; and he could eat at restaurants, especially as about all he ever wanted nowadays was coffee.

But at "dinner" he decided to put off telling Fanny of his plan until later: she was so nervous, and so distressed about the failure of her efforts with sweetbreads and macaroni; and she was so eager in her talk of how comfortable they would be "by this time to-morrow night." She fluttered on, her nervousness increasing, saying how "nice" it would be for him, when he came from work in the evenings, to be among "nice people—people who know who we *are*," and to have a pleasant game of bridge with "people who are really old friends of the family."

When they stopped probing among the scorched fragments she had set forth, George lingered downstairs, waiting for a better opportunity to introduce his own subject, but when he heard dismaying sounds from the kitchen he gave up. There was a crash, then a shower of crashes; falling tin clamoured to be heard above the shattering of porcelain; and over all rose Fanny's wail of lamentation for the treasures saved from the sale, but now lost forever to the "kitchenette."

Fanny was nervous indeed; so nervous that she could not trust her hands.

For a moment George thought she might have been injured, but, before he reached the kitchen, he heard her sweeping at the fragments, and turned back. He put off speaking to Fanny until morning.

Things more insistent than his vague plans for a sofa-bed in Bronson's office had possession of his mind as he went upstairs, moving his hand slowly along the smooth walnut railing of the balustrade. Halfway to the landing he stopped, turned, and stood looking down at the heavy doors masking the black emptiness that had been the library. Here he had stood on what he now knew was the worst day of his life; here he had stood when his mother passed through that doorway, hand-in-hand with her brother, to learn what her son had done.

He went on more heavily, more slowly; and, more heavily and slowly still, entered Isabel's room and shut the door. He did not come forth again, and bade Fanny good-night through the closed door when she stopped outside it later.

"I've put all the lights out, George," she said. "Everything's all right."

"Very well," he called. "Good-night."

She did not go. "I'm sure we're going to enjoy the new little home, George," she said timidly. "I'll try hard to make things nice for you, and the people really are lovely. You mustn't feel as if things are altogether gloomy, George. I know everything's going to turn out all right. You're young and strong and you have a good mind and I'm sure"—she hesitated—"I'm sure your mother's watching over you, Georgie. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night, Aunt Fanny."

His voice had a strangled sound in spite of him; but she seemed not to notice it, and he heard her go to her own room and lock herself in with bolt and key against burglars. She had said the one thing she should not have said just then: "I'm sure your mother's watching over you, Georgie."

She had meant to be kind, but it destroyed his last chance for sleep that night. He would have slept little if she had not said it, but since she had said it, he did not sleep at all. For he knew that it was true—if it *could* be true—and that his mother, if she still lived in spirit, would be weeping on the other side of the wall of silence, weeping and seeking for some gate to let her through so that she could come and "watch over him."

He felt that if there were such gates they were surely barred: they were like those awful library doors downstairs, which had shut her in to begin the suffering to which he had consigned her.

The room was still Isabel's. Nothing had been changed: even the photographs of George, of the Major, and of "brother George" still stood on her dressing-table, and in a drawer of her desk was an old picture of Eugene and Lucy, taken together, which George had found, but had slowly closed away again from sight, not touching it. To-morrow everything would be gone; and he had heard there was not long to wait before the house itself would be demolished. The very space which to-night was still Isabel's room would be cut into new shapes by new walls and floors and ceilings; yet the room would always live, for it could not die out of George's memory. It would live as long as he did, and it would always be murmurous with a tragic, wistful whispering.

And if space itself can be haunted, as memory is haunted, then some time, when the space that was Isabel's room came to be made into the small bedrooms and "kitchenettes" already designed as its destiny, that space might well be haunted and the new occupants come to feel that some seemingly causeless depression hung about it—a wraith of the passion that filled it throughout the last night that George Minafer spent there.

Whatever remnants of the old high-handed arrogance were still within him, he did penance for his deepest sin that night —and it may be that to this day some impressionable, overworked woman in a "kitchenette," after turning out the

light, will seem to see a young man kneeling in the darkness, shaking convulsively, and, with arms outstretched through the wall, clutching at the covers of a shadowy bed. It may seem to her that she hears the faint cry, over and over:

"Mother, forgive me! *God*, forgive me!"

CHAPTER XXXII

AT LEAST, it may be claimed for George that his last night in the house where he had been born was not occupied with his own disheartening future, but with sorrow for what sacrifices his pride and youth had demanded of others. And early in the morning he came downstairs and tried to help Fanny make coffee on the kitchen range.

"There was something I wanted to say to you last night, Aunt Fanny," he said, as she finally discovered that an amber fluid, more like tea than coffee, was as near ready to be taken into the human system as it would ever be. "I think I'd better do it now."

She set the coffee-pot back upon the stove with a little crash, and, looking at him in a desperate anxiety, began to twist her dainty apron between her fingers without any consciousness of what she was doing.

"Why—why——" she stammered; but she knew what he was going to say, and that was why she had been more and more nervous. "Hadn't—perhaps—perhaps we'd better get the—the things moved to the little new home first, George. Let's——"

He interrupted quietly, though at her phrase, "the little new home," his pungent impulse was to utter one loud shout and run. "It was about this new place that I wanted to speak. I've been thinking it over, and I've decided. I want you to take all the things from mother's room and use them and keep them for me, and I'm sure the little apartment will be just what you like; and with the extra bedroom probably you could find some woman friend to come and live there, and share the expense with you. But I've decided on another arrangement for myself, and so I'm not going with you. I don't suppose you'll mind much, and I don't see why you

should mind—particularly, that is. I'm not very lively company these days, or any days, for that matter. I can't imagine you, or anyone else, being much attached to me, so——"

He stopped in amazement: no chair had been left in the kitchen, but Fanny gave a despairing glance around her, in search of one, then sank abruptly, and sat flat upon the floor.

"You're going to leave me in the lurch!" she gasped.

"What on earth——" George sprang to her. "Get up, Aunt Fanny!"

"I can't. I'm too weak. Let me alone, George!" And as he released the wrist he had seized to help her, she repeated the dismal prophecy which for days she had been matching against her hopes: "You're going to leave me—in the lurch!"

"Why, no, Aunt Fanny!" he protested. "At first I'd have been something of a burden on you. I'm to get eight dollars a week; about thirty-two a month. The rent's thirty-six dollars a month, and the table-d'hôte dinner runs up to over twenty-two dollars apiece, so with my half of the rent—eighteen dollars—I'd have less than nothing left out of my salary to pay my share of the groceries for all the breakfasts and luncheons. You see you'd not only be doing all the housework and cooking, but you'd be paying more of the expenses than I would."

She stared at him with such a forlorn blankness as he had never seen. "I'd be paying——" she said feebly. "I'd be paying——"

"Certainly you would. You'd be using more of your money than——"

"My money!" Fanny's chin drooped upon her thin chest, and she laughed miserably. "I've got twenty-eight dollars. That's all."

"You mean until the interest is due again?"

"I mean that's all," Fanny said. "I mean that's all there is. There won't be any more interest because there isn't any principal."

"Why, you told——"

She shook her head. "No. I haven't told you anything."

"Then it was Uncle George. *He* told me you had enough to fall back on. That's just what he said: 'to fall back on.' He said you'd lost more than you should, in the headlight company, but he'd insisted that you should hold out enough to live on, and you'd very wisely followed his advice."

"I know," she said weakly. "I told him so. He didn't know, or else he'd forgotten, how much Wilbur's insurance amounted to, and I—oh, it seemed such a sure way to make a real fortune out of a little—and I thought I could do something for *you*, George, if you ever came to need it—and it all looked so bright I just thought I'd put it all in. I did—every cent except my last interest payment—and it's gone."

"Good Lord!" George began to pace up and down the worn planks of the bare floor. "Why on earth did you wait till now to tell such a thing as this?"

"I *couldn't* tell till I had to," she said piteously. "I couldn't till George Amberson went away. He couldn't do anything to help, anyhow, and I just didn't want him to talk to me about it—he's been at me so much about not putting more in than I could afford to lose, and said he considered he had my—my word I *wasn't* putting more than that in it. So I thought: What was the use? What was the use of going over it all with him and having him reproach me, and probably reproach himself? It wouldn't do any good—not any good on earth." She got out her lace handkerchief and began to cry. "Nothing does any good, I guess, in this old world! Oh, how tired of this old world I am! I didn't know *what* to do. I just tried to go ahead and be as practical as I could, and arrange *some* way for us to live. Oh, I knew you didn't want me, George! You always teased me and berated me whenever you had a chance from the time you were a little boy—you did *so!* Later, you've tried to be kinder to me, but you don't want me around—oh, I can see *that* much! You don't suppose I want to thrust myself on you, do you? It isn't very pleasant to be thrusting yourself on a person you know doesn't want you—but I knew you oughtn't to be left all alone in the world; it isn't good. I knew your mother'd want me to watch over

you and try to have *something* like a home for you—I know she'd want me to do what I tried to do!" Fanny's tears were bitter now, and her voice, hoarse and wet, was tragically sincere. "I tried—I tried to be practical—to look after your interests—to make things as nice for you as I could—I walked my heels down looking for a place for us to live—I walked and walked over this town—I didn't ride one block on a street-car—I wouldn't use five cents no matter how tired I—— Oh!" She sobbed uncontrollably. "Oh! and now —you don't want—you want—you want to leave me in the lurch! You——"

George stopped walking. "In God's name, Aunt Fanny," he said, "quit spreading out your handkerchief and drying it and then getting it all wet again! I mean stop crying! Do! And for heaven's sake, get up. Don't sit there with your back against the boiler and——"

"It's not hot," Fanny sniffled. "It's cold; the plumbers disconnected it. I wouldn't mind if they hadn't. I wouldn't mind if it burned me, George."

"Oh, my *Lord!*" He went to her, and lifted her. "For God's sake, get up! Come, let's take the coffee into the other room, and see what's to be done."

He got her to her feet; she leaned upon him, already somewhat comforted, and, with his arm about her, he conducted her to the dining-room and seated her in one of the two kitchen chairs which had been placed at the rough table. "There!" he said, "get over it!" Then he brought the coffee-pot, some lumps of sugar in a tin pan, and, finding that all the coffee-cups were broken, set water glasses upon the table, and poured some of the pale coffee into them. By this time Fanny's spirits had revived appreciably: she looked up with a plaintive eagerness. "I *had* bought all my fall clothes, George," she said; "and I paid every bill I owed. I don't owe a cent for clothes, George."

"That's good," he said wanly, and he had a moment of physical dizziness that decided him to sit down quickly. For an instant it seemed to him that he was not Fanny's nephew,

but married to her. He passed his pale hand over his paler forehead. "Well, let's see where we stand," he said feebly. "Let's see if we can afford this place you've selected."

Fanny continued to brighten. "I'm sure it's the most practical plan we could possibly have worked out, George—and it *is* a comfort to be among nice people. I think we'll both enjoy it, because the truth is we've been keeping too much to ourselves for a long while. It isn't good for people."

"I was thinking about the money, Aunt Fanny. You see——"

"I'm sure we can manage it," she interrupted quickly. "There really isn't a cheaper place in town that we could actually live in and be——" Here she interrupted herself. "Oh! There's one *great* economy I forgot to tell you, and it's especially an economy for you, because you're always too generous about such things: they don't allow any tipping. They have signs that prohibit it."

"That's good," he said grimly. "But the rent is thirty-six dollars a month; the dinner is twenty-two and a half for each of us, and we've got to have some provision for other food. We won't need any clothes for a year, perhaps——"

"Oh, longer!" she exclaimed. "So you see——"

"I see that forty-five and thirty-six make eighty-one," he said. "At the lowest, we need a hundred dollars a month—and I'm going to make thirty-two."

"I thought of that, George," she said confidently, "and I'm sure it will be all right. You'll be earning a great deal more than that very soon."

"I don't see any prospect of it—not till I'm admitted to the bar, and that will be two years at the earliest."

Fanny's confidence was not shaken. "I know *you'll* be getting on faster than——"

"'Faster?'" George echoed gravely. "We've got to have more than that to start with."

"Well, there's the six hundred dollars from the sale. Six hundred and twelve dollars it was."

"It isn't six hundred and twelve now," said George. "It's about one hundred and sixty."

Fanny showed a momentary dismay. "Why, how——"

"I lent Uncle George two hundred; I gave fifty apiece to old Sam and those two other old darkies that worked for grandfather so long, and ten to each of the servants here——"

"And you gave me thirty-six," she said thoughtfully, "for the first month's rent, in advance."

"Did I? I'd forgotten. Well, with about a hundred and sixty in bank and our expenses a hundred a month, it doesn't seem as if this new place——"

"Still," she interrupted, "we *have* paid the first month's rent in advance, and it does seem to be the most practical——"

George rose. "See here, Aunt Fanny," he said decisively. "You stay here and look after the moving. Old Frank doesn't expect me until afternoon, this first day, but I'll go and see him now."

. . . It was early, and old Frank, just established at his big, flat-topped desk, was surprised when his prospective assistant and pupil walked in. He was pleased, as well as surprised, however, and rose, offering a cordial old hand. "The real flair!" he said. "The real flair for the law. That's right! Couldn't wait till afternoon to begin! I'm delighted that you——"

"I wanted to say——" George began, but his patron cut him off.

"Wait just a minute, my boy. I've prepared a little speech of welcome, and even though you're five hours ahead of time, I mean to deliver it. First of all, your grandfather was my old war-comrade and my best client; for years I prospered through my connection with his business, and his grandson is welcome in my office and to my best efforts in his behalf. But I want to confess, Georgie, that during your earlier youth I may have had some slight feeling of—well, prejudice, not altogether in your favour; but whatever slight

feeling it was, it began to vanish on that afternoon, a good while ago, when you stood up to your Aunt Amelia Amberson as you did in the Major's library, and talked to her as a man and a gentleman should. I saw then what good stuff was in you—and I always wanted to mention it. If my prejudice hadn't altogether vanished after that, the last vestiges disappeared during these trying times that have come upon you this past year, when I have been a witness to the depth of feeling you've shown and your quiet consideration for your grandfather and for everyone else around you. I just want to add that I think you'll find an honest pleasure now in industry and frugality that wouldn't have come to you in a more frivolous career. The law is a jealous mistress and a stern mistress, but a——"

George had stood before him in great and increasing embarrassment; and he was unable to allow the address to proceed to its conclusion.

"I can't do it!" he burst out. "I can't take her for my mistress."

"What?"

"I've come to tell you, I've got to find something that's quicker. I can't——"

Old Frank got a little red. "Let's sit down," he said. "What's the trouble?"

George told him.

The old gentleman listened sympathetically, only murmuring: "Well, well!" from time to time, and nodding acquiescence.

"You see she's set her mind on this apartment," George explained. "She's got some old cronies there, and I guess she's been looking forward to the games of bridge and the kind of harmless gossip that goes on in such places. Really, it's a life she'd like better than anything else—better than that she's lived at home, I really believe. It struck me she's just about got to have it, and after all she could hardly have anything less."

"This comes pretty heavily upon me, you know," said old

Frank. "I got her into that headlight company, and she fooled me about her resources as much as she did your Uncle George. I was never your father's adviser, if you remember, and when the insurance was turned over to her some other lawyer arranged it—probably your father's. But it comes pretty heavily on me, and I feel a certain responsibility."

"Not at all. I'm taking the responsibility." And George smiled with one corner of his mouth. "She's not *your* aunt, you know, sir."

"Well, I'm unable to see, even if she's yours, that a young man is morally called upon to give up a career at the law to provide his aunt with a favourable opportunity to play bridge whist!"

"No," George agreed. "But I haven't begun my 'career at the law' so it can't be said I'm making any considerable sacrifice. I'll tell you how it is, sir." He flushed, and, looking out of the streaked and smoky window beside which he was sitting, spoke with difficulty. "I feel as if—as if perhaps I had one or two pretty important things in my life to make up for. Well, I can't. I can't make them up to—to whom I would. It's struck me that, as I couldn't, I might be a little decent to somebody else, perhaps—if I could manage it! I never have been particularly decent to poor old Aunt Fanny."

"Oh, I don't know: I shouldn't say that. A little youthful teasing—I doubt if she's minded so much. She felt your father's death terrifically, of course, but it seems to me she's had a fairly comfortable life—up to now—if she was disposed to take it that way."

"But 'up to now' is the important thing," George said. "Now is now—and you see I can't wait two years to be admitted to the bar and begin to practise. I've got to start in at something else that pays from the start, and that's what I've come to you about. I have an idea, you see."

"Well, I'm glad of that!" said old Frank, smiling. "I can't think of anything just at this minute that pays from the start."

"I only know of one thing, myself."

"What is it?"

George flushed again, but managed to laugh at his own embarrassment. "I suppose I'm about as ignorant of business as anybody in the world," he said. "But I've heard they pay very high wages to people in dangerous trades; I've always heard they did, and I'm sure it must be true. I mean people that handle touchy chemicals or high explosives —men in dynamite factories, or who take things of that sort about the country in wagons, and shoot oil wells. I thought I'd see if you couldn't tell me something more about it, or else introduce me to someone who could and then I thought I'd see if I couldn't get something of the kind to do as soon as possible. My nerves are good; I'm muscular, and I've got a steady hand; it seemed to me that this was about the only line of work in the world that I'm fitted for. I wanted to get started to-day if I could."

Old Frank gave him a long stare. At first this scrutiny was sharply incredulous; then it was grave; finally it developed into a threat of overwhelming laughter; a forked vein in his forehead became more visible and his eyes seemed about to protrude.

But he controlled his impulse; and, rising, took up his hat and overcoat. "All right," he said. "If you'll promise not to get blown up, I'll go with you to see if we can find the job." Then, meaning what he said, but amazed that he did mean it, he added: "You certainly are the most practical young man I ever met!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THEY found the job. It needed an apprenticeship of only six weeks, during which period George was to receive fifteen dollars a week; after that he would get twenty-eight. This settled the apartment question, and Fanny was presently established in a greater contentment than she had known for a long time. Early every morning she made something she called (and believed to be) coffee for George, and he was gallant enough not to undeceive her. She lunched alone in her "kitchenette," for George's place of employment was ten miles out of town on an interurban trolley-line, and he seldom returned before seven. Fanny found partners for bridge by two o'clock almost every afternoon, and she played until about six. Then she got George's "dinner clothes" out for him—he maintained this habit—and she changed her own dress. When he arrived he usually denied that he was tired, though he sometimes looked tired, particularly during the first few months; and he explained to her frequently—looking bored enough with her insistence—that his work was "fairly light, and fairly congenial, too." Fanny had the foggiest idea of what it was, though she noticed that it roughened his hands and stained them. "Something in those new chemical works," she explained to casual inquirers. It was not more definite in her own mind.

Respect for George undoubtedly increased within her, however, and she told him she'd always had a feeling he might "turn out to be a mechanical genius, or something." George assented with a nod, as the easiest course open to him. He did not take a hand at bridge after dinner: his provisions for Fanny's happiness refused to extend that far, and at the table d'hôte he was a rather discouraging boarder. He was considered "affected" and absurdly "up-stage"

by the one or two young men, and the three or four young women, who enlivened the elderly retreat; and was possibly less popular there than he had been elsewhere during his life, though he was now nothing worse than a coldly polite young man who kept to himself. After dinner he would escort his aunt from the table in some state (not wholly unaccompanied by a leerish wink or two from the wags of the place) and he would leave her at the door of the communal parlours and card rooms, with a formality in his bow of farewell which afforded an amusing contrast to Fanny's always voluble protests. (She never failed to urge loudly that he really *must* come and play, just this once, and not go hiding from everybody in his room *every* evening like this!) At least some of the other inhabitants found the contrast amusing, for sometimes, as he departed stiffly toward the elevator, leaving her still entreating in the doorway (though with one eye already on her table, to see that it was not seized) a titter would follow him which he was no doubt meant to hear. He did not care whether they laughed or not.

And once, as he passed the one or two young men of the place entertaining the three or four young women, who were elbowing and jerking on a settee in the lobby, he heard a voice inquiring quickly, as he passed:

"What makes people tired?"

"Work?"

"No."

"Well, what's the answer?"

Then, with an intentional outbreak of mirth, the answer was given by two loudly whispering voices together:

"A stuck-up boarder!"

George didn't care.

On Sunday mornings Fanny went to church and George took long walks. He explored the new city, and found it hideous, especially in the early spring, before the leaves of the shade trees were out. Then the town was fagged with the long winter and blacked with the heavier smoke that had been held close to the earth by the smoke-fog it bred. Every-

thing was damply streaked with the soot: the walls of the houses, inside and out, the gray curtains at the windows, the windows themselves, the dirty cement and unswept asphalt underfoot, the very sky overhead. Throughout this murky season he continued his explorations, never seeing a face he knew—for, on Sunday, those whom he remembered, or who might remember him, were not apt to be found within the limits of the town, but were congenially occupied with the new outdoor life which had come to be the mode since his boyhood. He and Fanny were pretty thoroughly buried away within the bigness of the city.

One of his Sunday walks, that spring, he made into a sour pilgrimage. It was a misty morning of belated snow slush, and suited him to a perfection of miserableness, as he stood before the great dripping department store which now occupied the big plot of ground where once had stood both the Amberson Hotel and the Amberson Opera House. From there he drifted to the old "Amberson Block," but this was fallen into a back-water; business had stagnated here. The old structure had not been replaced, but a cavernous entryway for trucks had been torn in its front, and upon the cornice, where the old separate metal letters had spelt "Amberson Block," there was a long billboard sign: "Doogan Storage."

To spare himself nothing, he went out National Avenue and saw the piles of slush-covered wreckage where the Mansion and his mother's house had been, and where the Major's ill-fated five "new" houses had stood; for these were down, too, to make room for the great tenement already shaped in unending lines of foundation. But the Fountain of Neptune was gone at last—and George was glad that it was!

He turned away from the devastated site, thinking bitterly that the only Amberson mark still left upon the town was the name of the boulevard—Amberson Boulevard. But he had reckoned without the city council of the new order, and by an unpleasant coincidence, while the thought was still in

his mind, his eye fell upon a metal oblong sign upon the lamp-post at the corner. There were two of these little signs upon the lamp-post, at an obtuse angle to each other, one to give passers-by the name of National Avenue, the other to acquaint them with Amberson Boulevard. But the one upon which should have been stencilled "Amberson Boulevard" exhibited the words "Tenth Street."

George stared at it hard. Then he walked quickly along the boulevard to the next corner and looked at the little sign there. "Tenth Street."

It had begun to rain, but George stood unheeding, staring at the little sign. "Damn them!" he said finally, and, turning up his coat-collar, plodded back through the soggy streets toward "home."

The utilitarian impudence of the city authorities put a thought into his mind. A week earlier he had happened to stroll into the large parlour of the apartment house, finding it empty, and on the centre-table he noticed a large, red-bound, gilt-edged book, newly printed, bearing the title: "A Civic History," and beneath the title, the rubric, "Biographies of the 500 Most Prominent Citizens and Families in the History of the City." He had glanced at it absently, merely noticing the title and sub-title, and wandered out of the room, thinking of other things and feeling no curiosity about the book. But he had thought of it several times since with a faint, vague uneasiness; and now when he entered the lobby he walked directly into the parlour where he had seen the book. The room was empty, as it always was on Sunday mornings, and the flamboyant volume was still upon the table—evidently a fixture as a sort of local Almanach de Gotha, or Burke, for the enlightenment of tenants and boarders.

He opened it, finding a few painful steel engravings of placid, chin-bearded faces, some of which he remembered dimly; but much more numerous, and also more unfamiliar to him, were the pictures of neat, aggressive men, with clipped short hair and clipped short moustaches—almost all of them

strangers to him. He delayed not long with these, but turned to the index where the names of the five hundred Most Prominent Citizens and Families in the History of the City were arranged in alphabetical order, and ran his finger down the column of *A's*:

Abbett	Adams
Abbott	Adams
Abrams	Adler
Akers	Andrews
Albertsmeyer	Appenbasch
Alexander	Archer
Allen	Arszman
Ambrose	Ashcraft
Ambuhl	Austin
Anderson	Avey

George's eyes remained for some time fixed on the thin space between the names "Allen" and "Ambrose." Then he closed the book quietly, and went up to his own room, agreeing with the elevator boy, on the way, that it was getting to be a mighty nasty wet and windy day outside.

The elevator boy noticed nothing unusual about him and neither did Fanny, when she came in from church with her hat ruined, an hour later. And yet something had happened —a thing which, years ago, had been the eagerest hope of many, many good citizens of the town. They had thought of it, longed for it, hoping acutely that they might live to see the day when it would come to pass. And now it had happened at last: George Minafer had got his come-upance.

He had got it three times filled and running over. The city had rolled over his heart, burying it under, as it rolled over the Major's and buried it under. The city had rolled over the Ambersons and buried them under to the last vestige; and it mattered little that George guessed easily enough that most of the five hundred Most Prominent had paid something substantial "to defray the cost of steel engraving, etc." —the Five Hundred had heaved the final shovelful of soot

upon that heap of obscurity wherein the Ambersons were lost forever from sight and history. "Quicksilver in a nest of cracks!"

Georgie Minafer had got his come-upance, but the people who had so longed for it were not there to see it, and they never knew it. Those who were still living had forgotten all about it and all about him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THERE was one border section of the city which George never explored in his Sunday morning excursions. This was far out to the north toward "Ornaby Addition" and its new streets, though he once went as far in that direction as the white house which Lucy had so admired long ago—her "Beautiful House." George looked at it briefly and turned back, rumbling with an interior laugh of some grimness. The house was white no longer; nothing could be white which the town had reached, and the town reached far beyond the beautiful white house now. The owners had given up and painted it a despairing chocolate, suitable to the freight-yard life it was called upon to endure.

George did not again risk going even so far as that, in the direction of the millionaires, although their settlement began at least two miles farther out. His thought of Lucy and her father was more a sensation than a thought, and may be compared to that of a convicted cashier beset by recollections of the bank he had pillaged—there are some thoughts to which one closes the mind. George had seen Eugene only once since their calamitous encounter. They had passed on opposite sides of the street, downtown; each had been aware of the other, and each had been aware that the other was aware of him, and yet each kept his eyes straight forward, and neither had shown a perceptible alteration of countenance. It seemed to George that he felt emanating from the outwardly imperturbable person of his mother's old friend a hate that was like a hot wind.

At his mother's funeral and at the Major's he had been conscious that Eugene was there: though he had afterward no recollection of seeing him, and, while certain of his presence, was uncertain how he knew of it. Fanny had not told him, for she understood George well enough not to speak

to him of Eugene or Lucy. Nowadays Fanny almost never saw either of them and seldom thought of them—so sly is the way of time with life. She was passing middle age, when old intensities and longings grow thin and flatten out, as Fanny herself was thinning and flattening out; and she was settling down contentedly to her apartment house intimacies. She was precisely suited by the table-d'hôte life, with its bridge, its variable alliances and shifting feuds, and the long whisperings of elderly ladies at corridor corners—those eager but suppressed conversations, all sibilance, of which the elevator boy declared he heard the words "*she said*" a million times and the word "*she*," five million. The apartment house suited Fanny and swallowed her.

The city was so big, now, that people disappeared into it unnoticed, and the disappearance of Fanny and her nephew was not exceptional. People no longer knew their neighbours as a matter of course; one lived for years next door to strangers—that sharpest of all the changes since the old days—and a friend would lose sight of a friend for a year, and not know it.

One May day George thought he had a glimpse of Lucy. He was not certain, but he was sufficiently disturbed, in spite of his uncertainty. A promotion in his work now frequently took him out of town for a week, or longer, and it was upon his return from one of these absences that he had the strange experience. He had walked home from the station, and as he turned the corner which brought him in sight of the apartment house entrance, though two blocks distant from it, he saw a charming little figure come out, get into a shiny landaulet automobile, and drive away. Even at that distance no one could have any doubt that the little figure was charming; and the height, the quickness and decision of motion, even the swift gesture of a white glove toward the chauffeur—all were characteristic of Lucy. George was instantly subjected to a shock of indefinable nature, yet definitely a shock: he did not know what he felt—but he knew that he felt. Heat surged over him: probably he would not have come

face to face with her if the restoration of all the ancient Amberson magnificence could have been his reward. He went on slowly, his knees shaky.

But he found Fanny not at home; she had been out all afternoon; and there was no record of any caller—and he began to wonder, then to doubt if the small lady he had seen in the distance was Lucy. It might as well have been, he said to himself—since anyone who looked like her could give him "a jolt like that!"

Lucy had not left a card. She never left one when she called on Fanny; though she did not give her reasons a quite definite form in her own mind. She came seldom; this was but the third time that year, and, when she did come, George was not mentioned, either by her hostess or by herself—an oddity contrived between the two ladies without either of them realizing how odd it was. For, naturally, while Fanny was with Lucy, Fanny thought of George, and what time Lucy had George's aunt before her eyes she could not well avoid the thought of him. Consequently, both looked absent-minded as they talked, and each often gave a wrong answer which the other consistently failed to notice.

At other times Lucy's thoughts of George were anything but continuous, and weeks went by when he was not consciously in her mind at all. Her life was a busy one: she had the big house "to keep up"; she had a garden to keep up, too, a large and beautiful garden; she represented her father as a director for half a dozen public charity organizations, and did private charity work of her own, being a proxy mother of several large families; and she had "danced down," as she said, groups from eight or nine classes of new graduates returned from the universities, without marrying any of them, but she still danced—and still did not marry.

Her father, observing this circumstance happily, yet with some hypocritical concern, spoke of it to her one day as they stood in her garden. "I suppose I'd want to shoot him," he said, with attempted lightness. "But I mustn't be an old pig. I'd build you a beautiful house close by—just over yonder."

"No, no! That would be like——" she began impulsively; then checked herself. George Amberson's comparison of the Georgian house to the Amberson Mansion had come into her mind, and she thought that another new house, built close by for her, would be like the house the Major built for Isabel.

"Like what?"

"Nothing." She looked serious, and when he reverted to his idea of "some day" grudgingly surrendering her up to a suitor, she invented a legend. "Did you ever hear the Indian name for that little grove of beech trees on the other side of the house?" she asked him.

"No—and you never did either!" he laughed.

"Don't be so sure! I read a great deal more than I used to —getting ready for my bookish days when I'll have to do something solid in the evenings and won't be asked to dance any more, even by the very youngest boys who think it's a sporting event to dance with the oldest of the 'older girls.' The name of the grove was 'Loma-Nashah' and it means 'They-Couldn't-Help-it.'"

"Doesn't sound like it."

"Indian names don't. There was a bad Indian chief lived in the grove before the white settlers came. He was the worst Indian that ever lived and his name was—it was 'Vendonah.' That means 'Rides-Down-Everything'"

"What?"

"His name was Vendonah, the same thing as Rides-Down-Everything."

"I see," said Eugene thoughtfully He gave her a quick look and then fixed his eyes upon the end of the garden path. "Go on."

"Vendonah was an unspeakable case," Lucy continued. "He was so proud that he wore iron shoes and he walked over people's faces with them. He was always killing people that way, and so at last the tribe decided that it wasn't a good enough excuse for him that he was young and inexperienced—he'd have to go. They took him down to the river, and put him in a canoe, and pushed him out from shore;

and then they ran along the bank and wouldn't let him land, until at last the current carried the canoe out into the middle, and then on down to the ocean, and he never got back. They didn't want him back, of course, and if he'd been able to manage it, they'd have put him in another canoe and shoved him out into the river again. But still, they didn't elect another chief in his place. Other tribes thought that was curious, and wondered about it a lot, but finally they came to the conclusion that the beech grove people were afraid a new chief might turn out to be a bad Indian, too, and wear iron shoes like Vendonah. But they were wrong, because the real reason was that the tribe had led such an exciting life under Vendonah that they couldn't settle down to anything tamer. He was awful, but he always kept things happening—terrible things, of course. They hated him, but they weren't able to discover any other warrior that they wanted to make chief in his place. I suppose it was a little like drinking a glass of too strong wine and then trying to take the taste out of your mouth with barley water. They couldn't help feeling that way."

"I see," said Eugene. "So that's why they named the place 'They-Couldn't-Help-It'!"

"It must have been."

"And so you're going to stay here in your garden," he said musingly. "You think it's better to keep on walking these sunshiny gravel paths between your flower-beds, and growing to look like a pensive garden lady in a Victorian engraving."

"I suppose I'm like the tribe that lived here, papa. I had too much unpleasant excitement. It was unpleasant—but it was excitement. I don't want any more; in fact, I don't want anything but you."

"You don't?" He looked at her keenly, and she laughed and shook her head; but he seemed perplexed, rather doubtful. "What was the name of the grove?" he asked. "The Indian name, I mean."

"Mola-Haha."

"No, it wasn't; that wasn't the name you said."

"I've forgotten."

"I see you have," he said, his look of perplexity remaining. "Perhaps you remember the chief's name better."

She shook her head again. "I don't!"

At this he laughed, but not very heartily, and walked slowly to the house, leaving her bending over a rose-bush, and a shade more pensive than the most pensive garden lady in any Victorian engraving.

. . . Next day, it happened that this same "Vendonah" or "Rides-Down-Everything" became the subject of a chance conversation between Eugene and his old friend Kinney, father of the fire-topped Fred. The two gentlemen found themselves smoking in neighbouring leather chairs beside a broad window at the club, after lunch.

Mr. Kinney had remarked that he expected to get his family established at the seashore by the Fourth of July, and, following a train of thought, he paused and chuckled. "Fourth of July reminds me," he said. "Have you heard what that Georgie Minafer is doing?"

"No, I haven't," said Eugene, and his friend failed to notice the crispness of the utterance.

"Well, sir," Kinney chuckled again, "it beats the devil! My boy Fred told me about it yesterday. He's a friend of this young Henry Akers, son of F. P. Akers of the Akers Chemical Company. It seems this young Akers asked Fred if he knew a fellow named Minafer, because he knew Fred had always lived here, and young Akers had heard some way that Minafer used to be an old family name here, and was sort of curious about it. Well, sir, you remember this young Georgie sort of disappeared, after his grandfather's death, and nobody seemed to know much what had become of him—though I did hear, once or twice, that he was still around somewhere. Well, sir, he's working for the Akers Chemical Company, out at their plant on the Thomasville Road."

He paused, seeming to reserve something to be delivered only upon inquiry, and Eugene offered him the expected

question, but only after a cold glance through the nose-glasses he had lately found it necessary to adopt. "What does he do?"

Kinney laughed and slapped the arm of his chair. "He's a nitro-glycerin expert!"

He was gratified to see that Eugene was surprised, if not, indeed, a little startled.

"He's what?"

"He's an expert on nitro-glycerin. Doesn't that beat the devil! Yes, sir! Young Akers told Fred that this George Minafer had worked like a houn'-dog ever since he got started out at the works. They have a special plant for nitro-glycerin, way off from the main plant, o' course—in the woods somewhere—and George Minafer's been working there, and lately they put him in charge of it. He oversees shooting oil-wells, too, and shoots 'em himself, sometimes. They aren't allowed to carry it on the railroads, you know—have to team it. Young Akers says George rides around over the bumpy roads, sitting on as much as three hundred quarts of nitro-glycerin! My Lord! Talk about romantic tumbles! If he gets blown sky-high some day he won't have a bigger drop, when he comes down, than he's already had! Don't it beat the devil! Young Akers said he's got all the nerve there is in the world. Well, he always did have plenty of *that*—from the time he used to ride around here on his white pony and fight all the Irish boys in Can-Town, with his long curls all handy to be pulled out. Akers says he gets a fair salary, and I should think he ought to! Seems to me I've heard the average life in that sort of work is somewhere around four years, and agents don't write any insurance at all for nitro-glycerin experts. Hardly!"

"No," said Eugene. "I suppose not."

Kinney rose to go. "Well, it's a pretty funny thing—pretty odd, I mean—and I suppose it would be pass-around-the-hat for old Fanny Minafer if he blew up. Fred told me that they're living in some apartment house, and said Georgie supports her. He was going to study law, but couldn't earn

enough that way to take care of Fanny, so he gave it up. Fred's wife told him all this. Says Fanny doesn't do anything but play bridge these days. Got to playing too high for awhile, and lost more than she wanted to tell Georgie about, and borrowed a little from old Frank Bronson. Paid him back, though. Don't know how Fred's wife heard it. Women do hear the darndest things!"

"They do," Eugene agreed.

"I thought you'd probably heard about it—thought most likely Fred's wife might have said something to your daughter, especially as they're cousins."

"I think not."

"Well, I'm off to the store," said Mr. Kinney briskly; yet he lingered. "I suppose we'll all have to club in and keep old Fanny out of the poorhouse if he does blow up. From all I hear it's usually only a question of time. They say she hasn't got anything else to depend on."

"I suppose not."

"Well—I wondered——" Kinney hesitated. "I was wondering why you hadn't thought of finding something around your works for him. They say he's an all-fired worker and he certainly does seem to have hid some decent stuff in him under all this damfoolishness. And you used to be such a tremendous friend of the family—I thought perhaps you—of course I know he's a queer lot—I know he's——"

"Yes, I think he is," said Eugene. "No. I haven't anything to offer him."

"I suppose not," Kinney returned thoughtfully, as he went out. "I don't know that I would myself. Well, we'll probably see his name in the papers some day if he stays with that job!"

. . . However, the nitro-glycerin expert of whom they spoke did not get into the papers as a consequence of being blown up, although his daily life was certainly a continuous exposure to that risk. Destiny has a constant passion for the incongruous, and it was George's lot to manipulate wholesale quantities of terrific and volatile explosives in safety,

and to be laid low by an accident so commonplace and inconsequent that it was a comedy. Fate had reserved for him the final insult of riding him down under the wheels of one of those juggernauts at which he had once shouted "Git a hoss!" Nevertheless, Fate's ironic choice for Georgie's undoing was not a big and swift and momentous car, such as Eugene manufactured; it was a specimen of the hustling little type that was flooding the country, the cheapest, commonest, hardiest little car ever made.

The accident took place upon a Sunday morning, on a downtown crossing, with the streets almost empty, and no reason in the world for such a thing to happen. He had gone out for his Sunday morning walk, and he was think ng of an automobile at the very moment when the little car struck him; he was thinking of a shiny landaulet and a charming figure stepping into it, and of the quick gesture of a white glove toward the chauffeur, motioning him to go on. Georgie heard a shout but did not look up, for he could not imagine anybody's shouting at him, and he was too engrossed in the question "Was it Lucy?" He could not decide, and his lack of decision in this matter probably superinduced a lack of decision in another, more pressingly vital. At the second and louder shout he did look up; and the car was almost on him; but he could not make up his mind if the charming little figure he had seen was Lucy's and he could not make up his mind whether to go backward or forward: these questions became entangled in his mind. Then, still not being able to decide which of two ways to go, he tried to go both—and the little car ran him down. It was not moving very rapidly, but it went all the way over George.

He was conscious of gigantic violence; of roaring and jolting and concussion; of choking clouds of dust, shot with lightning, about his head; he heard snapping sounds as loud as shots from a small pistol, and was stabbed by excruciating pains in his legs. Then he became aware that the machine was being lifted off of him. People were gathering in a circle round him, gabbling.

His forehead was bedewed with the sweat of anguish, and he tried to wipe off this dampness, but failed. He could not get his arm that far.

"Nev' mind," a policeman said; and George could see above his eyes the skirts of the blue coat, covered with dust and sunshine. "Amb'lance be here in a minute. Nev' mind tryin' to move any. You want 'em to send for some special doctor?"

"No." George's lips formed the word.

"Or to take you to some private hospital?"

"Tell them to take me," he said faintly, "to the City Hospital."

"A' right."

A smallish young man in a duster fidgeted among the crowd, explaining and protesting, and a strident voiced girl, his companion, supported his argument, declaring to everyone her willingness to offer testimony in any court of law that every blessed word he said was the God's truth.

"It's the fella that hit you," the policeman said, looking down on George. "I guess he's right; you must of b'en thinkin' about somep'm' or other. It's wunnerful the damage them little machines can do—you'd never think it—but I guess they ain't much case ag'in this fella that was drivin' it."

"You bet your life they ain't no case on me!" the young man in the duster agreed, with great bitterness. He came and stood at George's feet, addressing him heatedly: "I'm sorry fer *you* all right, and I don't say I ain't. I hold nothin' against you, but it wasn't any more my fault than the statehouse! You run into me, much as I run into you, and if you get well you ain't goin' to get not one single cent out o' me! This lady here was settin' with me and we both yelled at you. Wasn't goin' a *step* over eight mile an hour! I'm perfectly willing to say I'm sorry for you though, and so's the lady with me. We're both willing to say that much, but that's all, understand!"

George's drawn eyelids twitched; his misted glance rested fleetingly upon the two protesting motorists, and the old im-

perious spirit within him flickered up in a single word. Lying on his back in the middle of the street, where he was regarded by an increasing public as an unpleasant curiosity, he spoke this word clearly from a mouth filled with dust, and from lips smeared with blood.

. . . It was a word that interested the policeman. When the ambulance clanged away, he turned to a fellow patrolman who had joined him. "Funny what he says to the little cuss that done the damage. That's all he *did* call him—nothin' else at all—and the cuss had broke both his legs fer him and God-knows-what-all!"

"I wasn't here then. What was it?"

"'Riffraff!'"

CHAPTER XXXV

EUGENE'S feeling about George had not been altered by his talk with Kinney in the club window, though he was somewhat disturbed. He was not disturbed by Kinney's hint that Fanny Minafer might be left on the hands of her friends through her nephew's present dealings with nitro-glycerin, but he was surprised that Kinney had "led up" with intentional tact to the suggestion that a position might be made for George in the Morgan factory. Eugene did not care to have any suggestions about Georgie Minafer made to him. Kinney had represented Georgie as a new Georgie—at least in spots—a Georgie who was proving that decent stuff had been hid in him; in fact, a Georgie who was doing rather a handsome thing in taking a risky job for the sake of his aunt, poor old silly Fanny Minafer! Eugene didn't care what risks Georgie took, or how much decent stuff he had in him: nothing that Georgie would ever do in this world or the next could change Eugene Morgan's feeling toward him.

If Eugene could possibly have brought himself to offer Georgie a position in the automobile business, he knew full well the proud devil wouldn't have taken it from him; though Georgie's proud reason would not have been the one attributed to him by Eugene. George would never reach the point where he could accept anything material from Eugene and preserve the self-respect he had begun to regain.

But if Eugene had wished, he could easily have taken George out of the nitro-glycerin branch of the chemical works. Always interested in apparent impossibilities of invention, Eugene had encouraged many experiments in such gropings as those for the discovery of substitutes for gasoline and rubber; and, though his mood had withheld the information from Kinney, he had recently bought from the

elder Akers a substantial quantity of stock on the condition that the chemical company should establish an experimental laboratory. He intended to buy more; Akers was anxious to please him; and a word from Eugene would have placed George almost anywhere in the chemical works. George need never have known it, for Eugene's purchases of stock were always quiet ones: the transaction remained, so far, between him and Akers, and could be kept between them.

The possibility just edged itself into Eugene's mind; that is, he let it become part of his perceptions long enough for it to prove to him that it was actually a possibility. Then he half started with disgust that he should be even idly considering such a thing over his last cigar for the night, in his library. "No!" And he threw the cigar into the empty fireplace and went to bed.

His bitterness for himself might have worn away, but never his bitterness for Isabel. He took that thought to bed with him—and it was true that nothing George could do would ever change this bitterness of Eugene. Only George's mother could have changed it.

And as Eugene fell asleep that night, thinking thus bitterly of Georgie, Georgie in the hospital was thinking of Eugene. He had come "out of ether" with no great nausea, and had fallen into a reverie, though now and then a white sailboat staggered foolishly into the small ward where he lay. After a time he discovered that this happened only when he tried to open his eyes and look about him; so he kept his eyes shut, and his thoughts were clearer. He thought of Eugene Morgan and of the Major; they seemed to be the same person for a while, but he managed to disentangle them and even to understand why he had confused them. Long ago his grandfather had been the most striking figure of success in the town: "As rich as Major Amberson!" they used to say. Now there were three: Eugene and those two coming great figures, Sheridan of the Pump Works, and Dan Oliphant, of "Ornaby Addition." "If I had Eugene Morgan's money," he would hear the workmen day-dreaming at the

chemical works; or, "If Eugene Morgan had hold of this place you'd see things hum!" And the boarders at the table-d'hôte spoke of "the Morgan Place" as an eighteenth-century Frenchman spoke of Versailles. Like his uncle, George had perceived that the "Morgan Place" was the new Amberson Mansion. His reverie went back to the palatial days of the Mansion, in his boyhood, when he would gallop his pony up the driveway and order the darkey stablemen about, while they whooped and obeyed, and his grandfather, observing from a window, would laugh and call out to him, "That's right, Georgie. Make those lazy rascals jump!" He remembered his gay young uncles, and how the town was eager concerning everything about them, and about himself. What a clean, pretty town it had been! And in his reverie he saw like a pageant before him the magnificence of the Ambersons—its passing, and the passing of the Ambersons themselves. They had been slowly engulfed without knowing how to prevent it, and almost without knowing what was happening to them. The family lot, in the shabby older quarter, out at the cemetery, held most of them now; and the name was swept altogether from the new city. But the new great people who had taken their places—the Morgans and Akerses and Sheridans—they would go, too. George saw that. They would pass, as the Ambersons had passed, and though some of them might do better than the Major and leave the letters that spelled a name on a hospital or a street, it would be only a word and it would not stay forever. Nothing stays or holds or keeps where there is growth, he somehow perceived vaguely but truly. Great Cæsar dead and turned to clay stopped no hole to keep the wind away; dead Cæsar was nothing but a tiresome bit of print in a book that schoolboys study for a while and then forget. The Ambersons had passed, and the new people would pass, and the new people that came after them, and then the next few ones, and the next—and the next——

He had begun to murmur, and the man on duty as night nurse for the ward came and bent over him.

"Did you want something?"

"There's nothing in this family business," George told him confidentially. "Even George Washington is only something in a book."

. . . Eugene read a report of the accident in the next morning's paper. He was on the train, having just left for New York, on business, and with less leisure would probably have overlooked the obscure item:

LEGS BROKEN

G. A. Minafer, an employe of the Akers Chemical Co., was run down by an automobile yesterday at the corner of Tennessee and Main and had both legs broken. Minafer was to blame for the accident according to patrolman F. A. Kax, who witnessed the affair. The automobile was a small one driven by Herbert Cottleman of 2173 Noble Avenue who stated that he was making less than 4 miles an hour. Minafer is said to belong to a family formerly of considerable prominence in the city. He was taken to the City Hospital where physicians stated later that he was suffering from internal injuries besides the fracture of his legs but might recover.

Eugene read the item twice, then tossed the paper upon the opposite seat of his compartment, and sat looking out of the window. His feeling toward Georgie was changed not a jot by his human pity for Georgie's human pain and injury. He thought of Georgie's tall and graceful figure, and he shivered, but his bitterness was untouched. He had never blamed Isabel for the weakness which had cost them the few years of happiness they might have had together; he had put the blame all on the son, and it stayed there.

He began to think poignantly of Isabel: he had seldom been able to "see" her more clearly than as he sat looking out of his compartment window, after reading the account of this accident. She might have been just on the other side of the glass, looking in at him—and then he thought of her as the pale figure of a woman, seen yet unseen, flying through the air, beside the train, over the fields of springtime green

and through the woods that were just sprouting out their little leaves. He closed his eyes and saw her as she had been long ago. He saw the brown-eyed, brown-haired, proud, gentle, laughing girl he had known when first he came to town, a boy just out of the State College. He remembered —as he had remembered ten thousand times before—the look she gave him when her brother George introduced him to her at a picnic; it was "like hazel starlight" he had written her, in a poem, afterward. He remembered his first call at the Amberson Mansion, and what a great personage she seemed, at home in that magnificence; and yet so gay and friendly. He remembered the first time he had danced with her—and the old waltz song began to beat in his ears and in his heart. They laughed and sang it together as they danced to it:

"Oh, love for a year, a week, a day,
But alas for the love that lasts alway——"

Most plainly of all he could see her dancing; and he became articulate in the mourning whisper: "So graceful—oh, so graceful——"

All the way to New York it seemed to him that Isabel was near him, and he wrote of her to Lucy from his hotel the next night:

I saw an account of the accident to George Minafer. I'm sorry, though the paper states that it was plainly his own fault. I suppose it may have been as a result of my attention falling upon the item that I thought of his mother a great deal on the way here. It seemed to me that I had never seen her more distinctly or so constantly, but, as you know, thinking of his mother is not very apt to make me admire *him!* Of course, however, he has my best wishes for his recovery.

He posted the letter, and by the morning's mail received one from Lucy written a few hours after his departure from home. She enclosed the item he had read on the train.

I thought you might not see it.

I have seen Miss Fanny and she has got him put into a room by himself. Oh, *poor* Rides-Down-Everything! I have been thinking so constantly of his mother and it seemed to me that I have never seen her more distinctly. How lovely she was—and how she loved him!

If Lucy had not written this letter Eugene might not have done the odd thing he did that day. Nothing could have been more natural than that both he and Lucy should have thought intently of Isabel after reading the account of George's accident, but the fact that Lucy's letter had crossed his own made Eugene begin to wonder if a phenomenon of telepathy might not be in question, rather than a chance coincidence. The reference to Isabel in the two letters was almost identical: he and Lucy, it appeared, had been thinking of Isabel at the same time—both said "constantly" thinking of her—and neither had ever "seen her more distinctly." He remembered these phrases in his own letter accurately.

Reflection upon the circumstance stirred a queer spot in Eugene's brain—he had one. He was an adventurer; if he had lived in the sixteenth century he would have sailed the unknown new seas, but having been born in the latter part of the nineteenth, when geography was a fairly well-settled matter, he had become an explorer in mechanics. But the fact that he was a "hard-headed business man" as well as an adventurer did not keep him from having a queer spot in his brain, because hard-headed business men are as susceptible to such spots as adventurers are. Some of them are secretly troubled when they do not see the new moon over the lucky shoulder; some of them have strange, secret incredulities—they do not believe in geology, for instance; and some of them think they have had supernatural experiences. "Of course there was nothing in it—still it *was* queer!" they say.

Two weeks after Isabel's death, Eugene had come to New York on urgent business and found that the delayed arrival

of a steamer gave him a day with nothing to do. His room at the hotel had become intolerable; outdoors was intolerable; everything was intolerable. It seemed to him that he must see Isabel once more, hear her voice once more; that he *must* find some way to her, or lose his mind. Under this pressure he had gone, with complete scepticism, to a "trance-medium" of whom he had heard wild accounts from the wife of a business acquaintance. He thought despairingly that at least such an excursion would be "trying to do *some*thing!" He remembered the woman's name; found it in the telephone book, and made an appointment.

The experience had been grotesque, and he came away with an encouraging message from his father, who had failed to identify himself satisfactorily, but declared that everything was "on a higher plane" in his present state of being, and that all life was "continuous and progressive." Mrs. Horner spoke of herself as a "psychic"; but otherwise she seemed oddly unpretentious and matter-of-fact; and Eugene had no doubt at all of her sincerity. He was sure that she was not an intentional fraud, and though he departed in a state of annoyance with himself, he came to the conclusion that if any credulity were played upon by Mrs. Horner's exhibitions, it was her own.

Nevertheless, his queer spot having been stimulated to action by the coincidence of the letters, he went to Mrs. Horner's after his directors' meeting to-day. He used the telephone booth in the directors' room to make the appointment; and he laughed feebly at himself, and wondered what the group of men in that mahogany apartment would think if they knew what he was doing. Mrs. Horner had changed her address, but he found the new one, and somebody purporting to be a niece of hers talked to him and made an appointment for a "sitting" at five o'clock.

He was prompt, and the niece, a dull-faced fat girl with a magazine under her arm, admitted him to Mrs. Horner's apartment, which smelt of camphor; and showed him into a room with gray painted walls, no rug on the floor and no

furniture except a table (with nothing on it) and two chairs: one a leather easy-chair and the other a stiff little brute with a wooden seat. There was one window with the shade pulled down to the sill, but the sun was bright outside, and the room had light enough.

Mrs. Horner appeared in the doorway, a wan and unenterprising looking woman in brown, with thin hair artificially waved—but not recently—and parted in the middle over a bluish forehead. Her eyes were small and seemed weak, but she recognized the visitor.

"Oh, you been here before," she said, in a thin voice, not unmusical. "I recollect you. Quite a time ago, wa'n't it?"

"Yes, quite a long time."

"I recollect because I recollect you was disappointed. Anyway, you was kind of cross." She laughed faintly.

"I'm sorry if I seemed so," Eugene said. "Do you happen to have found out my name?"

She looked surprised and a little reproachful. "Why, no. I never try to find out people's names. Why should I? I don't claim anything for the power; I only know I have it—and some ways it ain't always such a blessing, neither, I can tell you!"

Eugene did not press an investigation of her meaning, but said vaguely, "I suppose not. Shall we——"

"All right," she assented, dropping into the leather chair, with her back to the shaded window. "You better set down, too, I reckon. I hope you'll get something this time so you won't feel cross, but I dunno. *I* can't never tell what they'll do. Well——"

She sighed, closed her eyes, and was silent, while Eugene, seated in the stiff chair across the table from her, watched her profile, thought himself an idiot, and called himself that and other names. And as the silence continued, and the impassive woman in the easy-chair remained impassive, he began to wonder what had led him to be such a fool. It became clear to him that the similarity of his letter and Lucy's needed no explanation involving telepathy, and was not even an ex-

traordinary coincidence. What, then, had brought him back to this absurd place and caused him to be watching this absurd woman taking a nap in a chair? In brief: What the devil did he mean by it? He had not the slightest interest in Mrs. Horner's naps—or in her teeth, which were being slightly revealed by the unconscious parting of her lips, as her breathing became heavier. If the vagaries of his own mind had brought him into such a grotesquerie as this, into what did the vagaries of other men's minds take them? Confident that he was ordinarily saner than most people, he perceived that since he was capable of doing a thing like this, other men did even more idiotic things, in secret. And he had a fleeting vision of sober-looking bankers and manufacturers and lawyers, well-dressed church-going men, sound citizens—and all as queer as the deuce inside!

How long was he going to sit here presiding over this unknown woman's slumbers? It struck him that to make the picture complete he ought to be shooing flies away from her with a palm-leaf fan.

Mrs. Horner's parted lips closed again abruptly, and became compressed; her shoulders moved a little, then jerked repeatedly; her small chest heaved; she gasped, and the compressed lips relaxed to a slight contortion, then began to move, whispering and bringing forth indistinguishable mutterings.

Suddenly she spoke in a loud, husky voice:

"Lopa is here!"

"Yes," Eugene said dryly. "That's what you said last time. I remember 'Lopa.' She's your 'control' I think you said."

"*I*'m Lopa," said the husky voice. "*I*'m Lopa herself."

"You mean I'm to suppose you're not Mrs. Horner now?"

"Never was Mrs. Horner!" the voice declared, speaking undeniably from Mrs. Horner's lips—but with such conviction that Eugene, in spite of everything, began to feel himself in the presence of a third party, who was none the less an individual, even though she might be another edition

of the apparently somnambulistic Mrs. Horner. "Never was Mrs. Horner or anybody but just Lopa. Guide."

"You mean you're Mrs. Horner's guide?" he asked.

"*Your* guide now," said the voice with emphasis, to which was incongruously added a low laugh. "You came here once before. Lopa remembers."

"Yes—so did Mrs. Horner."

Lopa overlooked his implication, and continued quickly: "You build. Build things that go. You came here once and old gentleman on this side, he spoke to you. Same old gentleman here now. He tell Lopa he's your grandfather—no, he says 'father.' He's your father."

"What's his appearance?"

"How?"

"What does he look like?"

"Very fine! White beard, but not long beard. He says someone else wants to speak to you. See here. Lady. Not his wife, though. No. Very fine lady! Fine lady, fine lady!"

"Is it my sister?" Eugene asked.

"Sister? No. She is shaking her head. She has pretty brown hair. She is fond of you. She is someone who knows you very well but she is not your sister. She is very anxious to say something to you—very anxious. Very fond of you; very anxious to talk to you. Very glad you came here—oh, *very* glad!"

"What is her name?"

"Name," the voice repeated, and seemed to ruminate. "Name hard to get—always very hard for Lopa. Name. She wants to tell me her name to tell you. She wants you to understand names are hard to make. She says you must think of something that makes a sound." Here the voice seemed to put a question to an invisible presence and to receive an answer. "A little sound or a big sound? She says it might be a little sound or a big sound. She says a ring—oh, Lopa knows! She means a bell! That's it, a bell."

Eugene looked grave. "Does she mean her name is Belle?"

"Not quite. Her name is longer."

"Perhaps," he suggested, "she means that she was a belle."

"No. She says she thinks you know what she means. She says you must think of a colour. What colour?" Again Lopa addressed the unknown, but this time seemed to wait for an answer.

"Perhaps she means the colour of her eyes," said Eugene.

"No. She says her colour is light—it's a light colour and you can see through it."

"Amber?" he said, and was startled, for Mrs. Horner, with her eyes still closed, clapped her hands, and the voice cried out in delight:

"Yes! She says you know who she is from amber. Amber! Amber! That's it! She says you understand what her name is from a bell and from amber. She is laughing and waving a lace handkerchief at me because she is pleased. She says I have made you know who it is."

This was the strangest moment of Eugene's life, because, while it lasted, he believed that Isabel Amberson, who was dead, had found means to speak to him. Though within ten minutes he doubted it, he believed it then.

His elbows pressed hard upon the table, and, his head between his hands, he leaned forward, staring at the commonplace figure in the easy-chair. "What does she wish to say to me?"

"She is happy because you know her. No—she is troubled. Oh—a great trouble! Something she wants to tell you. She wants so *much* to tell you. She wants Lopa to tell you. This is a great trouble. She says—oh, yes, she wants you to be—to be kind! That's what she says. That's it. To be kind."

"Does she——"

"She wants you to be kind," said the voice. "She nods when I tell you this. Yes; it must be right. She is a very fine lady. Very pretty. She is so anxious for you to understand. She hopes and hopes you will. Someone else wants to speak to you. This is a man. He says——"

"I don't want to speak to anyone else," said Eugene quickly. "I want——"

"This man who has come says that he is a friend of yours. He says——"

Eugene struck the table with his fist. "I don't want to speak to anyone else, I tell you!" he cried passionately. "If she is there I——" He caught his breath sharply, checked himself, and sat in amazement. Could his mind so easily accept so stupendous a thing as true? Evidently it could!

Mrs. Horner spoke languidly in her own voice: "Did you get anything satisfactory?" she asked. "I certainly hope it wasn't like that other time when you was cross because they couldn't get anything for you."

"No, no," he said hastily. "This was different. It was very interesting."

He paid her, went to his hotel, and thence to his train for home. Never did he so seem to move through a world of dream-stuff: for he knew that he was not more credulous than other men, and if he could believe what he had believed, though he had believed it for no longer than a moment or two, what hold had he or any other human being on reality?

His credulity vanished (or so he thought) with his recollection that it was he, and not the alleged "Lopa," who had suggested the word "amber." Going over the mortifying, plain facts of his experience, he found that Mrs. Horner, or the subdivision of Mrs. Horner known as "Lopa," had told him to think of a bell and of a colour, and that being furnished with these scientific data, he had leaped to the conclusion that he spoke with Isabel Amberson!

For a moment he had believed that Isabel was *there*, believed that she was close to him, entreating him—entreating him "to be kind." But with this recollection a strange agitation came upon him. After all, *had* she not spoken to him? If his own unknown consciousness had told the "psychic's" unknown consciousness how to make the picture of the pretty brown-haired, brown-eyed lady, hadn't the picture been a true one? And hadn't the true Isabel—oh, indeed her very soul!—called to him out of his own true memory of her?

And as the train roared through the darkened evening he

looked out beyond his window, and saw her as he had seen her on his journey, a few days ago—an ethereal figure flying beside the train, but now it seemed to him that she kept her face toward his window with an infinite wistfulness.

. . . "To be kind!" If it had been Isabel, was that what she would have said? If she were anywhere, and could come to him through the invisible wall, what would be the first thing she would say to him?

Ah, well enough, and perhaps bitterly enough, he knew the answer to that question! "To be kind"—to Georgie!

. . . A red-cap at the station, when he arrived, leaped for his bag, abandoning another which the Pullman porter had handed him. "Yessuh, Mist' Morgan. Yessuh. You' car waitin' front the station fer you, Mist' Morgan, suh!"

And people in the crowd about the gates turned to stare, as he passed through, whispering, "*That's Morgan.*"

Outside, the neat chauffeur stood at the door of the touring-car like a soldier in whip-cord.

"I'll not go home now, Harry," said Eugene, when he had got in. "Drive to the City Hospital."

"Yes, sir," the man returned. "Miss Lucy's there. She said she expected you'd come there before you went home."

"She did?"

"Yes, sir."

Eugene stared. "I suppose Mr. Minafer must be pretty bad," he said.

"Yes, sir." He moved his lever into high speed, and the car went through the heavy traffic like some fast, faithful beast that knew its way about, and knew its master's need of haste. Eugene did not speak again until they reached the hospital.

Fanny met him in the upper corridor, and took him to an open door.

He stopped on the threshold, startled; for, from the waxen face on the pillow, almost it seemed the eyes of Isabel herself were looking at him: never before had the resemblance be-

tween mother and son been so strong—and Eugene knew that now he had once seen it thus startlingly, he need divest himself of no bitterness "to be kind" to Georgie.

George was startled, too. He lifted a white hand in a queer gesture, half forbidding, half imploring, and then let his arm fall back upon the coverlet. "You must have thought my mother wanted you to come," he said, "so that I could ask you to—to forgive me."

But Lucy, who sat beside him, lifted ineffable eyes from him to her father, and shook her head. "No, just to take his hand—gently!"

But for Eugene a radiance filled the room. He knew that he had been true at last to his true love, and that through him she had brought her boy under shelter again. Her eyes would look wistful no more

PART TWO

THE TURMOIL

CHAPTER I

THE Ambersons were dispersed and in the life of the city the great Amberson Age was a dead age. Here and there might be found an individual with a trace of Amberson blood: Dan Oliphant, the glittering promoter of Ornaby Addition was one; and another such cousin was Mrs. Vertrees who lived in decayed gentility next door to the great new house of the Sheridans. But to Sheridan himself the name of Amberson meant nothing more than a word that had obliterated itself during his own rise to power. For the Sheridan Building was the biggest skyscraper; the Sheridan Trust Company was the biggest of its kind, and Sheridan himself was now the biggest builder and breaker and truster and buster under the smoke. He had come from a country cross-roads, at the beginning of the growth, and he had gone up and down in the booms and relapses of that period; but each time he went down he rebounded a little higher, until finally, after a year of overwork and anxiety—the latter not decreased by a chance, remote but possible, of recuperation from the former in the penitentiary—he found himself on top, with solid substance under his feet; and thereafter "played it safe." But his hunger to get was unabated, for it was in the very bones of him and grew fiercer.

He was the city incarnate. He loved it, calling it God's country, as he called the smoke Prosperity, breathing the dingy cloud with relish. And when soot fell upon his cuff he chuckled; he could have kissed it. "It's good! It's good!" he said, and smacked his lips in gusto. "Good, clean soot: it's our life-blood, God bless it!" The smoke was one of his great enthusiasms; he laughed at a committee of plaintive housewives who called to beg his aid against it. "Smoke's what brings your husbands' money home on Saturday night,"

he told them, jovially. "Smoke may hurt your little shrubberies in the front yard some, but it's the catarrhal climate and the adenoids that starts your chuldern coughing. Smoke makes the climate better. Smoke means good health: it makes the people wash more. They have to wash so much they wash off the microbes. You go home and ask your husbands what smoke puts in their pockets out o' the pay-roll—and you'll come around next time to get me to turn out more smoke instead o' chokin' it off!"

It was Narcissism in him to love the city so well; he saw his reflection in it; and, like it, he was grimy, big, careless, rich, strong, and unquenchably optimistic. From the deepest of his inside all the way out he believed it was the finest city in the world. "Finest" was his word. He thought of it as his city as he thought of his family as his family; and just as he profoundly believed his city to be the finest city in the world, so did he believe his family to be—in spite of his son Bibbs—the finest family in the world. As a matter of fact, he knew nothing worth knowing about either.

Bibbs Sheridan was a musing sort of boy, poor in health, and considered the failure—the "odd one"—of the family. Born during that most dangerous and anxious of the early years, when the mother fretted and the father took his chance, he was an ill-nourished baby, and grew meagrely, only lengthwise, through a feeble childhood. At his christening he was committed for life to "Bibbs" mainly through lack of imagination on his mother's part, for though it was her maiden name, she had no strong affection for it; but it was "her turn" to name the baby, and, as she explained later, she "couldn't think of anything else she liked *at all!*" She offered this explanation one day when the sickly boy was nine and after a long fit of brooding had demanded some reason for his name's being Bibbs. He requested then with unwonted vehemence to be allowed to exchange names with his older brother, Roscoe Conkling Sheridan, or with the oldest, James Sheridan, Junior, and upon being refused

went down into the cellar and remained there the rest of that day. And the cook, descending toward dusk, reported that he had vanished; but a search revealed that he was in the coal-pile, completely covered and still burrowing. Removed by force and carried upstairs, he maintained a cryptic demeanour, refusing to utter a syllable of explanation, even under the lash. This obvious thing was wholly a mystery to both parents; the mother was nonplussed, failed to trace and connect; and the father regarded his son as a stubborn and mysterious fool, an impression not effaced as the years went by.

At twenty-two, Bibbs was physically no more than the outer scaffolding of a man, waiting for the building to begin inside—a long-shanked, long-faced, rickety youth, sallow and hollow and haggard, dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a peculiar expression of countenance; indeed, at first sight of Bibbs Sheridan a stranger might well be solicitous, for he seemed upon the point of tears. But to a slightly longer gaze, not grief, but mirth, was revealed as his emotion; while a more searching scrutiny was proportionately more puzzling —he seemed about to burst out crying or to burst out laughing, one or the other, inevitably, but it was impossible to decide which. And Bibbs never, on any occasion of his life, either laughed aloud or wept.

He was a "disappointment" to his father. At least that was the parent's word—a confirmed and established word after his first attempt to make a "business man" of the boy. He sent Bibbs to "begin at the bottom and learn from the ground up" in the machine-shop of the Sheridan Automatic Pump Works, and at the end of six months the family physician sent Bibbs to begin at the bottom and learn from the ground up in a sanitarium.

"You needn't worry, mamma," Sheridan told his wife. "There's nothin' the matter with Bibbs except he hates work so much it makes him sick. *I* put him in the machine-shop, and I guess I know what I'm doin' about as well as the

next man. Old Doc Gurney always was one o' them nutty alarmists. Does he think I'd do anything 'd be bad for my own flesh and blood? He makes me tired!"

Anything except perfectly definite health or perfectly definite disease was incomprehensible to Sheridan. He had a genuine conviction that lack of physical persistence in any task involving money must be due to some subtle weakness of character itself, to some profound shiftlessness or slyness. He understood typhoid fever, pneumonia, and appendicitis—one had them, and either died or got over them and went back to work—but when the word "nervous" appeared in a diagnosis he became honestly suspicious: he had the feeling that there was something contemptible about it, that there was a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere.

"Look at me," he said. "Look at what *I* did at his age! Why, when I was twenty years old, wasn't I up every morning at four o'clock choppin' wood—yes! and out in the dark and the snow—to build a fire in a country grocery store? And here Bibbs has to go and have a *doctor* because he can't ——Pho! it makes me tired! If he'd gone at it like a man he wouldn't be sick."

He paced the bedroom—the usual setting for such parental discussions—in his nightgown, shaking his big, grizzled head and gesticulating to his bedded spouse. "My Lord!" he said. "If a little, teeny bit o' work like this is too much for him, why, he ain't fit for anything! It's nine-tenths imagination, and the rest of it—well, I won't say it's deliberate, but I *would* like to know just how much of it's put on!"

"Bibbs didn't want the doctor," said Mrs. Sheridan. "It was when he was here to dinner that night, and noticed how he couldn't eat anything. Honey, you better come to bed."

"Eat!" he snorted. "Eat! It's work that makes men eat! And it's imagination that keeps people from eatin'. Busy men don't get time for that kind of imagination; and there's another thing you'll notice about good health, if you'll take the trouble to look around you, Mrs. Sheridan:

busy men haven't got time to be sick and they don't *get* sick. You just think it over and you'll find that ninety-nine per cent. of the sick people you know are either women or loafers. Yes, ma'am!"

"Honey," she said again, drowsily, "you better come to bed."

"Look at the other boys," her husband bade her. "Look at Jim and Roscoe. Look at how *they* work! There isn't a shiftless bone in their bodies. Work never made Jim or Roscoe sick. Jim takes half the load off my shoulders already. Right now there isn't a harder-workin', brighter business man in this city than Jim. I've pushed him, but he give me something to push *against*. You can't push 'nervous dyspepsia'! And look at Roscoe; just *look* at what that boy's done for himself, and barely twenty-seven years old—married, got a fine wife, and ready to build for himself with his own money, when I put up the New House for you and Edie."

"Papa, you'll catch cold in your bare feet," she murmured. "You better come to bed."

"And I'm just as proud of Edie, for a girl," he continued, emphatically, "as I am of Jim and Roscoe for boys. She'll make some man a mighty good wife when the time comes. She's the prettiest and talentedest girl in the United States! Look at that poem she wrote when she was in school and took the prize with; it's the best poem I ever read in my life, and she'd never even tried to write one before. It's the finest thing I ever read, and R. T. Bloss said so, too; and I guess he's a good enough literary judge for me—turns out more advertisin' liter'cher than any man in this city. I tell you she's smart! Look at the way she worked me to get me to promise the New House—and I guess you had your finger in that, too, mamma! This old shack's good enough for me, but you and little Edie'll have to have your way. I'll get behind her and push her same as I will Jim and Roscoe. I tell you I'm mighty proud o' them three chuldern! But Bibbs——" He paused, shaking his head. "Honest, mamma, when I talk to men that got *all* their boys doin' well and

worth their salt, why, I have to keep my mind on Jim and Roscoe and forget about Bibbs."

Mrs. Sheridan tossed her head fretfully upon the pillow. "You did the best you could, papa," she said, impatiently, "so come to bed and quit reproachin' yourself for it."

He glared at her indignantly. "Reproachin' myself!" he snorted. "I ain't doin' anything of the kind! What in the name o' goodness would I want to reproach myself for? And it wasn't the 'best *I* could,' either. It was the best *anybody* could! I was givin' him a chance to show what was in him and make a man of himself—and here he goes and gets 'nervous dyspepsia' on me!"

He went to the old-fashioned gas-fixture, turned out the light, and muttered his way morosely into bed.

"What?" said his wife, crossly, bothered by a subsequent mumbling.

"More like hook-worm, I said," he explained, speaking louder. "*I* don't know what to do with him!"

CHAPTER II

BEGINNING at the beginning and learning from the ground up was a long course for Bibbs at the sanitarium, with milk and "zwieback" as the basis of instruction; and the months were many and tiresome before he was considered near enough graduation to go for a walk leaning on a nurse and a cane. These and subsequent months saw the planning, the building, and the completion of the New House; and it was to that abode of Bigness that Bibbs was brought when the cane, without the nurse, was found sufficient to his support.

Edith met him at the station. "Well, well, Bibbs!" she said, as he came slowly through the gates, the last of all the travellers from that train. She gave his hand a brisk little shake, averting her eyes after a quick glance at him, and turning at once toward the passage to the street. "Do you think they ought to 've let you come? You certainly don't look well!"

"But I certainly do look better," he returned, in a voice as slow as his gait; a drawl that was a necessity, for when Bibbs tried to speak quickly he stammered. "Up to about a month ago it took two people to see me. They had to get me in a line between 'em!"

Edith did not turn her eyes directly toward him again, after her first quick glance; and her expression, in spite of her, showed a faint, troubled distaste, the look of a healthy person pressed by some obligation of business to visit a "bad" ward in a hospital. She was nineteen, fair and slim, with small, unequal features, but a prettiness of colour and a brilliancy of eyes that created a total impression close upon beauty. Her movements were eager and restless: there was something about her, as kind old ladies say, that was very

sweet; and there was something that was hurried and breathless. This was new to Bibbs; it was a perceptible change since he had last seen her, and he bent upon her a steady, whimsical scrutiny as they stood at the curb, waiting for an automobile across the street to disengage itself from the traffic.

"That's the new Morgan car," she said. "Everything's new. We've got four now, besides Jim's. Roscoe's got two."

"Edith, you look——" he began, and paused.

"Oh, *we*'re all well," she said, briskly; and then, as if something in his tone had caught her as significant, "Well, *how* do I look, Bibbs?"

"You look——" He paused again, taking in the full length of her—her trim brown shoes, her scant, tapering, rough skirt, and her coat of brown and green, her long green tippet and her mad little rough hat in the mad mode—all suited to the October day.

"How do I look?" she insisted.

"You look," he answered, as his examination ended upon an incrusted watch of platinum and enamel at her wrist, "you look—expensive!" That was a substitute for what he had intended to say, for her constraint and preoccupation, manifested particularly in her keeping her direct glance away from him, did not seem to grant the privilege of impulsive intimacies.

"I expect I am!" she laughed, and sidelong caught the direction of his glance. "Of course I oughtn't to wear it in the daytime—it's an evening thing, for the theatre—but my day wrist-watch is out of gear. Bobby Lamhorn broke it yesterday; he's a regular rowdy sometimes. Do you want Claus to help you in?"

"Oh, no," said Bibbs. "I'm alive." And after a fit of panting subsequent to his climbing into the car unaided, he added, "Of course, I have to *tell* people!"

"We only got your telegram this morning," she said, as they began to move rapidly through the "wholesale district" neighbouring the station. "Mother said she'd hardly expected you this month."

"They seemed to be through with me up there in the country," he explained, gently. "At least they said they were, and they wouldn't keep me any longer, because so many really sick people wanted to get in. They told me to go home—and I didn't have any place else to go. It'll be all right, Edith; I'll sit in the woodshed until after dark every day."

"Pshaw!" She laughed nervously. "Of course we're all of us glad to have you back."

"Yes?" he said. "Father?"

"Of course! Didn't he write and tell you to come home?" She did not turn to him with the question. All the while she rode with her face directly forward.

"No," he said; "father hasn't written."

She flushed a little. "I expect *I* ought to 've written some time, or one of the boys——"

"Oh no; that was all right."

"You can't think how busy we've all been this year, Bibbs. I often planned to write—and then, just as I was going to, something would turn up. And I'm sure it's been just the same way with Jim and Roscoe. Of course we knew mamma was writing often, and——"

"Of course!" he said, readily. "There's a chunk of coal fallen on your glove, Edith. Better flick it off before it smears. My word! I'd almost forgotten how sooty it is here."

"We've been having very bright weather this month—for us." She blew the flake of soot into the air, seeming relieved.

He looked up at the dingy sky, wherein hung the disconsolate sun like a cold tin pan nailed up in a smoke-house by some lunatic, for a decoration. "Yes," said Bibbs. "It's very gay." A few moments later, as they passed a corner, "Aren't we going home?" he asked.

"Why, yes! Did you want to go somewhere else first?"

"No. Your new driver's taking us out of the way, isn't he?"

"No. This is right. We're going straight home."

"But we've passed the corner. We always turned——"

"Good gracious!" she said. "Didn't you know we'd moved? Didn't you know we were in the New House?"

"Why, no!" said Bibbs. "Are you?"

"We've been there a month! Good gracious! Didn't you know——" She broke off, flushing again, and then went on hastily: "Of course, mamma's never been so busy in her life; we *all* haven't had time to do anything but keep on the hop. Mamma couldn't even come to the station to-day. Papa's got some of his business friends and people from around the *old*-house neighbourhood coming to-night for a big dinner and 'house-warming'—dreadful kind of people—but mamma's got it all on her hands. She's never sat down a *minute;* and if she did, papa would have her up again before——"

"Of course," said Bibbs. "Do you like the new place, Edith?"

"I don't like some of the things father *would* have in it, but it's the finest house in town, and that ought to be good enough for me! It's a lot finer house than that rich old Mr. Eugene Morgan's, everybody thinks. Papa bought one thing I like—a view of the Bay of Naples in oil that's perfectly beautiful; it's the first thing you see as you come in the front hall, and it's eleven feet long. But he would have that old fruit picture we had in the Murphy Street house hung up in the new dining-room. You remember it—a table and a watermelon sliced open, and a lot of rouged-looking apples and some shiny lemons, with two dead prairie-chickens on a chair? He bought it at a furniture-store years and years ago, and he claims it's a finer picture than any they saw in the museums, that time he took mamma to Europe. But it's horribly out of date to have those things in dining-rooms, and I caught Bobby Lamhorn giggling at it; and Sibyl made fun of it, too, with Bobby, and then told papa she agreed with him about its being such a fine thing, and said he did just right to insist on having it where he wanted it. She makes me tired! Sibyl!"

Edith's first constraint with her brother, amounting almost to awkwardness, vanished with this theme, though she still kept her full gaze always to the front, even in the extreme ardour of her denunciation of her sister-in-law.

"*Sibyl!*" she repeated, with such heat and vigour that the name seemed to strike fire on her lips. "I'd like to know why Roscoe couldn't have married somebody from *here* that would have done us some good! He could have got in with Bobby Lamhorn years ago just as well as now, and Bobby'd have introduced him to the nicest girls in town, but instead of that he had to go and pick up this Sibyl Rink! I met some awfully nice people from her town when mamma and I were at Atlantic City, last spring, and not one had ever even heard of the Rinks! Not even *heard* of 'em!"

"I thought you were great friends with Sibyl," Bibbs said.

"Up to the time I found her out!" the sister returned, with continuing vehemence. "I've found out some things about Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan lately——"

"It's only lately?"

"Well——" Edith hesitated, her lips setting primly. "Of course, I always did see that she never cared the snap of her little finger about *Roscoe!*"

"It seems," said Bibbs, in laconic protest, "that she married him."

The sister emitted a shrill cry, to be interpreted as contemptuous laughter, and, in her emotion, spoke too impulsively: "Why, she'd have married *you!*"

"No, no," he said; "she couldn't be that bad!"

"I didn't mean——" she began, distressed. "I only meant—— I didn't mean——"

"Never mind, Edith," he consoled her. "You see, she couldn't have married me, because I didn't know her; and besides, if she's as mercenary as all that she'd have been too clever. The head doctor even had to lend me the money for my ticket home."

"I didn't mean anything unpleasant about *you*," Edith babbled. "I only meant I thought she was the kind of a

girl who was so simply crazy to marry somebody she'd have married anybody that asked her."

"Yes, yes," said Bibbs; "it's all straight." And, perceiving that his sister's expression was that of a person whose adroitness has set matters perfectly to rights, he chuckled silently.

"Roscoe's perfectly lovely to her," she continued, a moment later. "Too lovely! If he'd wake up a little and lay down the law, some day, like a *man*, I guess she'd respect him more and learn to behave herself!"

"'Behave'?"

"Oh, well, I mean she's so insincere," said Edith, characteristically evasive when it came to stating the very point to which she had led, and in this not unique of her sex.

Bibbs contented himself with a non-committal gesture. "Business is crawling up old National Avenue," he said, his long, tremulous hand indicating a vasty structure in course of erection. "The boarding-houses come first and then the——"

"That isn't for shops," she informed him. "That's a new investment of papa's—the 'Sheridan Apartments.'"

"Well, well," he murmured. "I supposed 'Sheridan' was almost well enough known here already."

"Oh, we're well enough known *about!*" she said, impatiently. "I guess there isn't a man, woman, child, or nigger baby in town that doesn't know who we are. But we aren't in with the right people."

"No!" he exclaimed. "Who's all that?"

"Who's all what?"

"The 'right people.'"

"You know what I mean: the best people, the old families —the people that have the real social position in this town and that know they've got it."

Bibbs indulged in his silent chuckle again; he seemed greatly amused. "I thought that the people who actually had the real what-you-may-call-it didn't know it," he said. "I've always understood that it was very unsatisfactory, be-

cause if you thought about it you didn't have it, and if you had it you didn't know it."

"That's just bosh," she retorted. "They know it in this town, all right! I found out a lot of things, long before we began to think of building out in this direction. The right people in this town aren't always the society-column ones, and they mix around with outsiders, and they don't all belong to any one club—they've taken in all sorts into all their clubs—but they're a clan, just the same; and they have the clan feeling and they're just as much We, Us and Company as any crowd you read about anywhere in the world. Most of 'em were here long before papa came, and the grandfathers of the girls of my age knew each other, and——"

"I see," Bibbs interrupted, gravely. "Their ancestors fled together from many a stricken field, and Crusaders' blood flows in their veins. I always understood the first house was built by an old party of the name of Vertrees who couldn't get along with Dan'l Boone, and hurried away to these parts because Dan'l wanted him to give back a gun he'd lent him."

Edith gave a little ejaculation of alarm. "You mustn't repeat that story, Bibbs, even if it's true. The Vertreeses are *the* best family, and of course the very oldest here; they were an old family even before Mary Vertrees's great-great-grandfather came west and founded this settlement. He came from Lynn, Massachusetts, and they have relatives there *yet*—some of the best people in Lynn!"

"No!" exclaimed Bibbs, incredulously.

"And there are other old families like the Vertreeses," she went on, not heeding him; "the Lamhorns and the Oliphants and the Shelbys and the Kittersbys and the J. Palmerston Smiths——"

"Strange names to me," he interrupted. "Poor things! None of them have my acquaintance."

"No, that's just it!" she cried. "And papa had never even heard the name of Vertrees! Mrs. Vertrees went with some anti-smoke committee to see him, and he told her that

smoke was what made her husband bring home his wages from the pay-roll on Saturday night! *He* told us about it, and I thought I just couldn't live through the night, I was so ashamed! Mr. Vertrees has always lived on his income, and papa didn't know him, of course. They're the stiffest, most elegant people in the whole town. And to crown it all, papa went and bought the next lot to the old Vertrees country mansion—it's in the very heart of the best new residence district now, and that's where the New House is, right next door to them—and I must say it makes their place look rather shabby! I met Mary Vertrees when I joined the Mission Service Helpers, but she never did any more than just barely bow to me, and since papa's break I doubt if she'll do that! They haven't called."

"And you think if I spread this gossip about Vertrees the First stealing Dan'l Boone's gun, the chances that they *will* call——"

"Papa knows what a break he made with Mrs. Vertrees. I made him understand that," said Edith, demurely, "and he's promised to try and meet Mr. Vertrees and be nice to him. It's just this way: if we don't know *them*, it's practically no use in our having built the New House; and if we *do* know them and they're decent to us, we're right with the right people. They can do the whole thing for us. Bobby Lamhorn told Sibyl he was going to bring his mother to call on her and on mamma, but it was weeks ago, and I notice he hasn't done it; and if Mrs. Vertrees decides not to know us, I'm darn sure Mrs. Lamhorn'll never come. That's *one* thing Sibyl didn't manage! She *said* Bobby offered to bring his mother——"

"You say he is a friend of Roscoe's?" Bibbs asked.

"Oh, he's a friend of the whole family," she returned, with a petulance which she made an effort to disguise. "Roscoe and he got acquainted somewhere, and they take him to the theatre about every other night. Sibyl has him to lunch, too, and keeps——" She broke off with an angry little jerk of the head. "We can see the New House from the

second corner ahead. Roscoe has built straight across the street from us, you know. Honestly, Sibyl makes me think of a snake, sometimes—the way she pulls the wool over people's eyes! She honeys up to papa and gets anything in the world she wants out of him, and then makes fun of him behind his back—yes, and to his face, but *he* can't see it! She got him to give her a twelve-thousand-dollar porch for their house after it was——"

"Good heavens!" said Bibbs, staring ahead as they reached the corner and the car swung to the right, following a bend in the street. "Is that the New House?"

"Yes. What do you think of it?"

"Well," he drawled, "I'm pretty sure the sanitarium's about half a size bigger; I can't be certain till I measure."

And a moment later, as they entered the driveway, he added, seriously:

"But it's beautiful!"

CHAPTER III

IT WAS gray stone, with long roofs of thick green slate. An architect who loved the milder "Gothic motives" had built what he liked: it was to be seen at once that he had been left unhampered, and he had wrought a picture out of his head into a noble and exultant reality. At the same time a landscape-designer had played so good a second, with ready-made accessories of screen, approach and vista, that already whatever look of newness remained upon the place was to its advantage, as showing at least one thing yet clean under the grimy sky. For, though the smoke was thinner in this direction, and at this long distance from the heart of the town, it was not absent, and under tutelage of wind and weather could be malignant even here, where cows had wandered in the meadows and corn had been growing not ten years gone.

Altogether, the New House was a success. It was one of those architects' successes which leave the owners veiled in privacy; it revealed nothing of the people who lived in it save that they were rich. There are houses that cannot be detached from their own people without protesting: every inch of mortar seems to mourn the separation, and such a house—no matter what be done to it—is ever murmurous with regret, whispering the old name sadly to itself unceasingly. But the New House was of a kind to change hands without emotion. In our swelling cities, great places of its type are useful as financial gauges of the business tides; rich families, one after another, take title and occupy such houses as fortunes rise and fall—they mark the high tide. It was impossible to imagine a child's toy wagon left upon a walk or driveway of the New House, and yet it was—as Bibbs rightly called it—"beautiful."

What the architect thought of the "Golfo di Napoli," which hung in its vast gold revel of rococo frame against the gray wood of the hall, is to be conjectured—perhaps he had not seen it.

"Edith, did you say only eleven feet?" Bibbs panted, staring at it, as the white-jacketed twin of a Pullman porter helped him to get out of his overcoat.

"Eleven without the frame," she explained. "It's splendid, don't you think? It lightens things up so. The hall was kind of gloomy before."

"No gloom now!" said Bibbs.

"This statue in the corner is pretty, too," she remarked. "Mamma and I bought that." And Bibbs turned at her direction to behold, amid a grove of tubbed palms, a "life-size," black-bearded Moor, of a plastic composition painted with unappeasable gloss and brilliancy. Upon his chocolate head he wore a gold turban; in his hand he held a gold-tipped spear; and for the rest, he was red and yellow and black and silver.

"Hallelujah!" was the sole comment of the returned wanderer, and Edith, saying she would "find mamma," left him blinking at the Moor. Presently, after she had disappeared, he turned to the coloured man who stood waiting, Bibbs's travelling-bag in his hand. "What do *you* think of it?" Bibbs asked, solemnly.

"Gran'!" replied the servitor. "She mighty hard to dus'. Dus' git in all 'em wrinkles. Yessuh, she mighty hard to dus'."

"I expect she must be," said Bibbs, his glance returning reflectively to the black bull beard for a moment. "Is there a place anywhere I could lie down?"

"Yessuh. We got one nem spare rooms all fix up fo' you, suh. Right up staihs, s-h. Nice room."

He led the way, and Bibbs followed slowly, stopping at intervals to rest, and noting a heavy increase in the staff of service since the exodus from the "old" house. Maids and scrubwomen were at work under the patently nominal

direction of another Pullman porter, who was profoundly enjoying his own affectation of being harassed with care.

"Ev'ything got look spick an' span fo' the big doin's to-night," Bibbs's guide explained, chuckling. "Yessuh, we got big doin's to-night! Big doin's!"

The room to which he conducted his lagging charge was furnished in every particular like a room in a new hotel; and Bibbs found it pleasant—though, indeed, any room with a good bed would have seemed pleasant to him after his journey. He stretched himself flat immediately, and having replied "Not now" to the attendant's offer to unpack the bag, closed his eyes wearily.

White-jacket, racially sympathetic, lowered the window-shades and made an exit on tiptoe, encountering the other white-jacket—the harassed overseer—in the hall without. Said the emerging one:

"He mighty shaky, Mist' Jackson. Drop right down an' shet his eyes. Eyelids all black. Rich folks gotta go same as anybody else. Anybody ast me if I change 'ith 'at ole boy—No, suh! Le'm keep 'is money; I keep my black skin an' keep out the ground!"

Mr. Jackson expressed the same preference. "Yessuh, he look tuh me like somebody awready laid out," he concluded. And upon the stairway landing, near by, two old women, on all-fours at their work, were likewise pessimistic.

"Hech!" said one, lamenting in a whisper. "It give me a turn to see him go by—white as wax an' bony as a dead fish! Mrs. Cronin, tell me: d'it make ye kind o' sick to look at um?"

"Sick? No more than the face of a blessed angel already in heaven!"

"Well," said the other, "I'd a b'y o' me own come home t' die once——" She fell silent at a rustling of skirts in the corridor above them.

It was Mrs. Sheridan hurrying to greet her son.

She was one of those fat, pink people who fade and contract with age like drying fruit; and her outside was a true

portrait of her. Her husband and her daughter had long ago absorbed her. What intelligence she had was given almost wholly to comprehending and serving those two, and except in the presence of one of them she was nearly always absent-minded. Edith lived all day with her mother, as daughters do; and Sheridan so held his wife to her unity with him that she had long ago become unconscious of her existence as a thing separate from his. She invariably perceived his moods, and nursed him through them when she did not share them; and she gave him a profound sympathy with the inmost spirit and purpose of his being, even though she did not comprehend it and partook of it only as a spectator. They had known but one actual altercation in their lives, and that was thirty years past, in the early days of Sheridan's struggle, when, in order to enhance the favourable impression he believed himself to be making upon some capitalists, he had thought it necessary to accompany them to a performance of "The Black Crook." But she had not once referred to this during the last ten years.

Mrs. Sheridan's manner was hurried and inconsequent; her clothes rustled more than other women's clothes; she seemed to wear too many at a time and to be vaguely troubled by them, and she was patting a skirt down over some unruly internal dissension at the moment she opened Bibbs's door.

At sight of the recumbent figure she began to close the door softly, withdrawing, but the young man had heard the turning of the knob and the rustling of skirts, and he opened his eyes.

"Don't go, mother," he said. "I'm not asleep." He swung his long legs over the side of the bed to rise, but she set a hand on his shoulder, restraining him; and he lay flat again.

"No," she said, bending over to kiss his cheek, "I just come for a minute, but I want to see how you seem. Edith said——"

"Poor Edith!" he murmured. "She couldn't look at me. She——"

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Sheridan, having let in the light at a window, came back to the bedside. "You look a great deal better than what you did before you went to the sanitarium, anyway. It's done you good; a body can see that right away. You need fatting up, of course, and you haven't got much colour——"

"No," he said, "I haven't much colour."

"But you will have when you get your strength back."

"Oh yes!" he responded, cheerfully. "*Then* I will."

"You look a great deal better than what I expected."

"Edith must have a great vocabulary!" he chuckled.

"She's too sensitive," said Mrs. Sheridan, "and it makes her exaggerate a little. What about your diet?"

"That's all right. They told me to eat anything."

"Anything at all?"

"Well—anything I could."

"That's good," she said, nodding. "They mean for you just to build up your strength. That's what they told me the last time I went to see you at the sanitarium. You look better than what you did then, and that's only a little time ago. How long was it?"

"Eight months, I think."

"No, it couldn't be. I know it ain't *that* long, but maybe it was longer 'n I thought. And this last month or so I haven't had scarcely even time to write more than just a line to ask how you were gettin' along, but I told Edith to write, the weeks I couldn't, and I asked Jim to, too, and they both said they would, so I suppose you've kept up pretty well on the home news."

"Oh yes."

"What *I* think you need," said the mother, gravely, "is to liven up a little and take an interest in things. That's what papa was sayin' this morning, after we got your telegram; and that's what 'll stimilate your appetite, too. He was talkin' over his plans for you——"

"Plans?" Bibbs, turning on his side, shielded his eyes from

the light with his hand, so that he might see her better. "What——" He paused. "What plans is he making for me, mother?"

She turned away, going back to the window to draw down the shade. "Well, you better talk it over with *him*," she said, with perceptible nervousness. "He better tell you himself. I don't feel as if I had any call, exactly, to go into it; and you better get to sleep now, anyway." She came and stood by the bedside once more. "But you must remember, Bibbs, whatever papa does is for the best. He loves his chuldern and wants to do what's right by *all* of 'em—and you'll always find he's right in the end."

He made a little gesture of assent, which seemed to content her; and she rustled to the door, turning to speak again after she had opened it. "You get a good nap, now, so as to be all rested up for to-night."

"You—you mean—he——" Bibbs stammered, having begun to speak too quickly. Checking himself, he drew a long breath, then asked, quietly, "Does father expect me to come downstairs this evening?"

"Well, I think he does," she answered. "You see, it's the 'house-warming,' as he calls it, and he said he thinks all our chuldern ought to be around us, as well as the old friends and other folks. It's just what he thinks you need—to take an interest and liven up. You don't feel too bad to come down, do you?"

"Mother?"

"Well?"

"Take a good look at me," he said.

"Oh, see here!" she cried, with brusque cheerfulness. "You're not so bad off as you think you are, Bibbs. You're on the mend; and it won't do you any harm to please your——"

"It isn't that," he interrupted. "Honestly, I'm only afraid it might spoil somebody's appetite. Edith——"

"I told you the child was too sensitive," she interrupted,

in turn. "You're a plenty good-lookin' enough young man for anybody! You look like you been through a long spell and begun to get well, and that's all there is to it."

"All right. I'll come to the party. If the rest of you can stand it, I can!"

"It'll do you good," she returned, rustling into the hall. "Now take a nap, and I'll send one o' the help to wake you in time for you to get dressed up before dinner. You go to sleep right away, now, Bibbs!"

Bibbs was unable to obey, though he kept his eyes closed. Something she had said kept running in his mind, repeating itself over and over interminably. "His plans for you—his plans for you—his plans for you—his plans for you——" And then, taking the place of "his plans for you," after what seemed a long, long while, her flurried voice came back to him insistently, seeming to whisper in his ear: "He loves his chuldern—he loves his chuldern—he loves his chuldern"—"you'll find he's always right—you'll find he's always right——" Until at last, as he drifted into the state of half-dreams and distorted realities, the voice seemed to murmur from beyond a great black wing that came out of the wall and stretched over his bed—it was a black wing within the room, and at the same time it was a black cloud crossing the sky, bridging the whole earth from pole to pole. It was a cloud of black smoke, and out of the heart of it came a flurried voice whispering over and over, "His plans for you—his plans for you—his plans for you——" And then there was nothing.

He woke refreshed, stretched himself gingerly—as one might have a care against too quick or too long a pull upon a frayed elastic—and, getting to his feet, went blinking to the window and touched the shade so that it flew up, letting in a pale sunset.

He looked out into the lemon-coloured light and smiled wanly at the next house, as Edith's grandiose phrase came to mind, "the old Vertrees country mansion." It stood in a broad lawn which was separated from the Sheridans' by a young hedge; and it was a big, square, plain old box of a

house with a giant salt-cellar atop for a cupola. Paint had been spared for a long time, and no one could have put a name to the colour of it, but in spite of that the place had no look of being out at heel, and the sward was as neatly trimmed as the Sheridans' own.

The separating hedge ran almost beneath Bibbs's window —for this wing of the New House extended here almost to the edge of the lot—and, directly opposite the window, the Vertreeses' lawn had been graded as so to make a little knoll upon which stood a small rustic "summer-house." It was almost on a level with Bibbs's window and not thirty feet away; and it was easy for him to imagine the present dynasty of Vertreeses in grievous outcry when they had found this retreat ruined by the juxtaposition of the parvenu intruder. Probably the "summer-house" was pleasant and pretty in summer. It had the look of a place wherein little girls had played for a generation or so with dolls and "housekeeping," or where a lovely old lady might come to read something dull on warm afternoons; but now in the thin light it was desolate, the colour of dust, and hung with haggard vines which had lost their leaves.

Bibbs looked at it with grave sympathy, probably feeling some kinship with anything so dismantled; then he turned to a cheval-glass beside the window and paid himself the dubious tribute of a thorough inspection. He looked the mirror up and down, slowly, repeatedly, but came in the end to a long and earnest scrutiny of the face. Throughout this cryptic séance his manner was profoundly impersonal; he had the air of an entomologist intent upon classifying a specimen, but finally he appeared to become pessimistic. He shook his head solemnly; then gazed again and shook his head again, and continued to shake it slowly, in complete disapproval.

"You certainly are one horrible sight!" he said, aloud.

And at that he was instantly aware of an observer. Turning quickly, he was vouchsafed the picture of a charming lady, framed in a rustic aperture of the "summer-house" and staring full into his window—straight into his eyes, too, for the

infinitesimal fraction of a second before the flashingly censorious withdrawal of her own. Composedly, she pulled several dead twigs from a vine, the manner of her action conveying a message or proclamation to the effect that she was in the summer-house for the sole purpose of such-like pruning and tending, and that no gentleman could suppose her presence there to be due to any other purpose whatsoever, or that, being there on that account, she had allowed her attention to wander for one instant in the direction of things of which she was in reality unconscious.

Having pulled enough twigs to emphasize her unconsciousness—and at the same time her disapproval—of everything in the nature of a Sheridan or belonging to a Sheridan, she descended the knoll with maintained composure, and sauntered toward a side-door of the country mansion of the Vertreeses. An elderly lady, bonneted and cloaked, opened the door and came to meet her.

"Are you ready, Mary? I've been looking for you. What were you doing?"

"Nothing. Just looking into one of Sheridans' windows," said Mary Vertrees. "I got caught at it."

"Mary!" cried her mother. "Just as we were going to call! Good heavens!"

"We'll go, just the same," the daughter returned. "I suppose those women would be glad to have us if we'd burned their house to the ground."

"But *who* saw you?" insisted Mrs. Vertrees.

"One of the sons, I suppose he was. I believe he's insane, or something. At least I hear they keep him in a sanitarium somewhere, and never talk about him. He was staring at himself in a mirror and talking to himself. Then he looked out and caught me."

"What did he——"

"Nothing, of course."

"How did he look?"

"Like a ghost in a blue suit," said Miss Vertrees, moving toward the street and waving a white-gloved hand in farewell

to her father, who was observing them from the window of his library. "Rather tragic and altogether impossible. Do come on, mother, and let's get it over!"

And Mrs. Vertrees, with many misgivings, set forth with her daughter for their gracious assault upon the New House next door.

CHAPTER IV

MR. VERTREES, having watched their departure with the air of a man who had something at hazard upon the expedition, turned from the window and began to pace the library thoughtfully, pending their return. He was about sixty; a small man, withered and dry and fine, a trim little sketch of the elderly dandy. His lambrequin moustache—relic of a forgotten Anglomania—had been profoundly black, but now, like his smooth hair, it was approaching an equally sheer whiteness; and though his clothes were old, they had shapeliness and a flavour of mode. And for greater spruceness there were some jaunty touches: gray spats, a narrow black ribbon across the gray waistcoat to the eye-glasses in a pocket, a fleck of colour from a button in the lapel of the black coat, labelling him the descendant of patriot warriors.

The room was not like him, being cheerful and hideous, whereas Mr. Vertrees was anxious and decorative. Under a mantel of imitation black marble a merry little coal-fire beamed forth upon high and narrow "Eastlake" bookcases with long glass doors, and upon comfortable, incongruous furniture, and upon meaningless "woodwork" everywhere, and upon half a dozen Landseer engravings which Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees sometimes mentioned to each other, after thirty years of possession, as "very fine things." They had been the first people in town to possess Landseer engravings, and there, in art, they had rested, but they still had a feeling that in all such matters they were in the van; and when Mr. Vertrees discovered Landseers upon the walls of other people's houses he thawed, as a chieftain to a trusted follower; and if he found an edition of Bulwer Lytton accompanying the Landseers as a final corroboration of culture, he would say, inevitably, "Those people know good pictures and they know good books."

The growth of the city, which might easily have made him a millionaire, had ruined him because, like Major Amberson, he had failed to understand it. When towns begin to grow they have whims, and the whims of a town always ruin somebody. Mr. Vertrees had been most strikingly the somebody in this case. At about the time he bought the Landseers, he owned, through inheritance, an office-building and a large house not far from it, where he spent the winter; and he had a country place—a farm of four hundred acres—where he went for the summers to the comfortable, ugly old house that was his home now, perforce, all the year round. If he had known how to sit still and let things happen he would have prospered miraculously; but, strangely enough, the dainty little man was one of the first to fall down and worship Bigness, the which proceeded straightway to enact the rôle of Juggernaut for his better education. He was a true prophet of the prodigious growth, but he had a fatal gift for selling good and buying bad. He should have stayed at home and looked at his Landseers and read his Bulwer, but he took his cow to market, and the trained milkers milked her dry and then ate her. He sold the office-building and the house in town to buy a great tract of lots in a new suburb; then he sold the farm, except the house and the ground about it, to pay the taxes on the suburban lots and to "keep them up." The lots refused to stay up; but he had to do something to keep himself and his family up, so in despair he sold the lots (which went up beautifully the next year) for "traction stock" that was paying dividends; and thereafter he ceased to buy and sell. Thus he disappeared altogether from the commercial surface at about the time that his wife's great relatives, the Ambersons, disappeared from all surfaces. A little later James Sheridan came out securely on top; and Sheridan, until Mrs. Vertrees called upon him with her "anti-smoke" committee, had never heard her name.

Mr. Vertrees, pinched, retired to his Landseers, and Mrs. Vertrees "managed somehow" on the dividends, though "managing" became more and more difficult as the years

went by and money bought less and less. But there came a day when three servitors of Bigness in Philadelphia took greedy counsel with four fellow-worshippers from New York, and not long after that there were no more dividends for Mr. Vertrees. In fact, there was nothing for Mr. Vertrees, because the "traction stock" henceforth was no stock at all, and he had mortgaged his house long ago to help "manage somehow" according to his conception of his "position in life"—one of his own old-fashioned phrases. Six months before the completion of the New House next door, Mr. Vertrees had sold his horses and the worn Victoria and "station-wagon," to pay the arrears of his two servants and re-establish credit at the grocer's and butcher's—and a pair of elderly carriage-horses with such accoutrements are not very ample barter, in these days, for six months' food and fuel and service. Mr. Vertrees had discovered, too, that there was no salary for him in all the buzzing city—he could do nothing.

It may be said that he was at the end of his string. Such times do come in all their bitterness, finally, to the man with no trade or craft, if his feeble clutch on that slippery ghost, Property, shall fail.

The windows grew black while he paced the room, and smoky twilight closed round about the house, yet not more darkly than what closed round about the heart of the anxious little man patrolling the fan-shaped zone of firelight. But as the mantel clock struck wheezily six there was the rattle of an outer door, and a rich and beautiful peal of laughter went ringing through the house. Thus cheerfully did Mary Vertrees herald her return with her mother from their expedition among the barbarians.

She came rushing into the library and threw herself into a deep chair by the hearth, laughing so uncontrollably that tears were in her eyes. Mrs. Vertrees followed decorously, no mirth about her; on the contrary, she looked vaguely disturbed, as if she had eaten something not quite certain to agree with her, and regretted it.

"Papa! Oh, oh!" And Miss Vertrees was fain to apply a

handkerchief upon her eyes. "I'm *so* glad you made us go! I wouldn't have missed it——"

Mrs. Vertrees shook her head. "I suppose I'm very dull," she said, gently. "I didn't see anything amusing. They're most ordinary, and the house is altogether in bad taste, but we anticipated that, and——"

"Papa!" Mary cried, breaking in. "They asked us to *dinner!*"

"What!"

"And I'm *going!*" she shouted, and was seized with fresh paroxysms. "Think of it! Never in their house before; never met any of them but the daughter—and just *barely* met her——"

"What about you?" interrupted Mr. Vertrees, turning sharply upon his wife.

She made a little face, as if positive now that what she had eaten would not agree with her. "I couldn't!" she said. "I——"

"Yes, that's just—just the way she—she looked when they asked her!" cried Mary, choking. "And then she—she realized it, and tried to turn it into a cough, and she didn't know how, and it sounded like—like a squeal!"

"I suppose," said Mrs. Vertrees, much injured, "that Mary will have an uproarious time at my funeral. She makes fun of——"

Mary jumped up instantly and kissed her; then she went to the mantel and, leaning an elbow upon it, gazed thoughtfully at the buckle of her shoe, twinkling in the firelight.

"*They* didn't notice anything," she said. "So far as they were concerned, mamma, it was one of the finest coughs you ever coughed."

"Who were 'they'?" asked her father. "Whom did you see?"

"Only the mother and daughter," Mary answered. "Mrs. Sheridan is dumpy and rustly; and Miss Sheridan is pretty and pushing—dresses by the fashion magazines and talks about New York people that have their pictures in 'em. She

tutors the mother, but not very successfully—partly because her own foundation is too flimsy and partly because she began too late. They've got an enormous Moor of painted plaster or something in the hall, and the girl evidently thought it was to her credit that she selected it!"

"They have oil-paintings, too," added Mrs. Vertrees, with a glance of gentle pride at the Landseers. "I've always thought oil-paintings in a private house the worst of taste."

"Oh, if one owned a Raphael or a Titian!" said Mr. Vertrees, finishing the implication, not in words, but with a wave of his hand. "Go on, Mary. None of the rest of them came in? You didn't meet Mr. Sheridan or——" He paused and adjusted a lump of coal in the fire delicately with the poker. "Or one of the sons?"

Mary's glance crossed his, at that, with a flash of utter comprehension. He turned instantly away, but she had begun to laugh again.

"No," she said, "no one except the women, but mamma inquired about the sons thoroughly!"

"Mary!" Mrs. Vertrees protested.

"Oh, most adroitly, too!" laughed the girl. "Only she couldn't help unconsciously turning to look at me—when she did it!"

"Mary Vertrees!"

"Never mind, mamma! Mrs. Sheridan and Miss Sheridan neither of *them* could help unconsciously turning to look at me—speculatively—at the same time! They all three kept looking at me and talking about the oldest son, Mr. James Sheridan, Junior. Mrs. Sheridan said his father is very anxious 'to get Jim to marry and settle down,' and she assured me that 'Jim is right cultivated.' Another of the sons, the youngest one, caught me looking in the window this afternoon; but they didn't seem to consider him quite one of themselves, somehow, though Mrs. Sheridan mentioned that a couple of years or so ago he had been 'right sick,' and had been to some cure or other. They seemed relieved to bring the subject back to

'Jim' and his virtues—and to look at me! The other brother is the middle one, Roscoe; he's the one that owns the new house across the street, where that young black-sheep of the Lamhorns, Robert, goes so often. I saw a short, dark young man standing on the porch with Robert Lamhorn there the other day, so I suppose that was Roscoe. 'Jim' still lurks in the mists, but I shall meet him to-night. Papa——" She stepped nearer to him so that he had to face her, and his eyes were troubled as he did. There may have been a trouble deep within her own, but she kept their surface merry with laughter. "Papa, Bibbs is the youngest one's name, and Bibbs —to the best of our information—is a lunatic. Roscoe is married. Papa, does it have to be Jim?"

"Mary!" Mrs. Vertrees cried, sharply. "You're outrageous! That's a perfectly horrible way of talking!"

"Well, I'm close to twenty-four," said Mary, turning to her. "I haven't been able to like anybody yet that's asked me to marry him, and maybe I never shall. Until a year or so ago I've had everything I ever wanted in my life—you and papa gave it all to me—and it's about time I began to pay back. Unfortunately, I don't know how to do anything—but something's got to be done."

"But you needn't talk of it like *that!*" insisted the mother, plaintively. "It's not—it's not——"

"No, it's not," said Mary. "I know that!"

"How did they happen to ask you to dinner?" Mrs. Vertrees inquired, uneasily. " 'Stextrawdn'ry thing!"

"Climbers' hospitality," Mary defined it. "We were so very cordial and easy! I think Mrs. Sheridan herself might have done it just as any kind old woman on a farm might ask a neighbour, but it was Miss Sheridan who did it. She played around it awhile; you could see she wanted to—she's in a dreadful hurry to get into things!—and I fancied she had an idea it might impress that Lamhorn boy to find us there to-night. It's a sort of house-warming dinner, and they talked about it and talked about it—and then the girl got her cour-

age up and blurted out the invitation. And mamma——" Here Mary was once more a victim to incorrigible merriment. "Mamma tried to say yes, and *couldn't!* She swallowed and squealed—I mean you coughed, dear! And then, papa, she said that you and she had promised to go to a lecture at the Emerson Club to-night, but that her daughter would be delighted to come to the Big Show! So there I am, and there's Mr. Jim Sheridan—and there's the clock! Dinner's at seven-thirty!"

And she ran out of the room, scooping up her fallen furs with a gesture of flying grace as she sped.

When she came down, at twenty minutes after seven, her father stood in the hall, at the foot of the stairs, waiting to be her escort through the dark. He looked up and watched her as she descended, and his gaze was fond and proud—and profoundly disturbed. But she smiled and nodded gaily, and, when she reached the floor, put a hand on his shoulder.

"At least no one could suspect me to-night," she said. "I *look* rich, don't I, papa?"

She did. She had a look that worshipful girl friends bravely called "regal." A head taller than her father, she was as straight and jauntily poised as a boy athlete; and her brown hair and her brown eyes were like her mother's, but for the rest she went back to some stronger and livelier ancestor than either of her parents.

"Don't I look too rich to be suspected?" she insisted.

"You look everything beautiful, Mary," he said, huskily.

"And my dress?" She threw open her dark velvet cloak, showing a splendour of white and silver. "Anything better at Nice next winter, do you think?" She laughed, shrouding her glittering figure in the cloak again. "Two years old, and no one would dream it! I did it over."

"You can do anything, Mary."

There was a curious humility in his tone, and something more—a significance not veiled and yet abysmally apologetic. It was as if he suggested something to her and begged her forgiveness in the same breath.

And upon that, for the moment, she became as serious as he. She lifted her hand from his shoulder and then set it back more firmly, so that he should feel the reassurance of its pressure.

"Don't worry," she said, in a low voice and gravely. "I know exactly what you want me to do."

CHAPTER V

IT WAS a brave and lustrous banquet; and a noisy one, too, because there was an orchestra among some plants at one end of the long dining-room, and after a preliminary stiffness the guests were impelled to converse—necessarily at the tops of their voices. The whole company of fifty sat at a great oblong table, improvised for the occasion by carpenters; but, not betraying itself as an improvisation, it seemed a permanent continent of damask and lace, with shores of crystal and silver running up to spreading groves of orchids and lilies and white roses—an inhabited continent, evidently, for there were three marvellous, gleaming buildings: one in the centre and one at each end, white miracles wrought by some inspired craftsman in sculptural icing. They were models in miniature, and they represented the Sheridan Building, the Sheridan Apartments, and the Pump Works. Nearly all the guests recognized them without having to be told what they were, and pronounced the likenesses superb.

The arrangement of the table was visibly baronial. At the head sat the great Thane, with the flower of his family and of the guests about him; then on each side came the neighbours of the "old" house, grading down to vassals and retainers—superintendents, cashiers, heads of departments, and the like—at the foot, where the Thane's lady took her place as a consolation for the less important. Here, too, among the thralls and bondmen, sat Bibbs Sheridan, a meek Banquo, wondering how anybody could look at him and eat.

Nevertheless, there was a vast, continuous eating, for these were wholesome folk who understood that dinner meant something intended for introduction into the system by means of an aperture in the face, devised by nature for that express purpose. And besides, nobody looked at Bibbs.

He was better content to be left to himself; his voice was not strong enough to make itself heard over the hubbub without an exhausting effort, and the talk that went on about him was too fast and too fragmentary for his drawl to keep pace with it. So he felt relieved when each of his neighbours in turn, after a polite inquiry about his health, turned to seek livelier responses in other directions. For the talk went on with the eating, incessantly. It rose over the throbbing of the orchestra and the clatter and clinking of silver and china and glass, and there was a mighty babble.

"Yes, sir! Started without a dollar." . . . "Yellow flounces on the overskirt——" . . . "I says, 'Wilkie, your department's got to go bigger this year,' I says.". . . "Fifteen per cent. turnover in thirty-one weeks.". . . "One of the biggest men in the biggest——" . . . "The wife says she'll have to let out my pants if my appetite——" . . . "Say, did you see that statue of a Turk in the hall? One of the finest things I ever——" . . . "'Not a dollar, not a nickel, not one red cent do you get out o' me,' I says, and so he ups and——" . . . "Yes, the baby makes four they've lost, now.". . . "Well, they got their raise, and they went in big.". . . "Yes, sir! Not a dollar to his name, and look at what——" . . . "You wait! The population of this town's goin' to hit the million mark before she stops.". . . "Well, if you can show me a bigger deal than——"

And through the interstices of this clamouring Bibbs could hear the continual booming of his father's heavy voice, and once he caught the sentence, "Yes, young lady, that's just what did it for me, and that's just what'll do it for my boys—they got to make two blades o' grass grow where one grew before!" It was his familiar flourish, an old story to Bibbs, and now jovially declaimed for the edification of Mary Vertrees.

It was a great night for Sheridan—the very crest of his wave. He sat there knowing himself Thane and master by his own endeavour; and his big, smooth, red face grew more and more radiant with good will and with the simplest, happiest,

most boylike vanity. He was the picture of health, of good cheer, and of power on a holiday. He had thirty teeth, none bought, and showed most of them when he laughed; his grizzled hair was thick, and as unruly as a farm labourer's; his chest was deep and big beneath its vast façade of starched white linen, where little diamonds twinkled, circling three large pearls; his hands were stubby and strong, and he used them freely in gestures of marked picturesqueness; and, though he had grown fat at chin and waist and wrist, he had not lost the look of readiness and activity.

He dominated the table, shouting jocular questions and railleries at everyone. His idea was that when people were having a good time they were noisy: and his own additions to the hubbub increased his pleasure, and, of course, met the warmest encouragement from his guests. Edith had discovered that he had very foggy notions of the difference between a band and an orchestra, and when it was made clear to him he had held out for a band until Edith threatened tears; but the size of the orchestra they hired consoled him, and he had now no regrets in the matter.

He kept time to the music continually—with his feet, or pounding on the table with his fist, and sometimes with spoon or knife upon his plate or a glass, without permitting these side-products to interfere with the real business of eating and shouting.

"Tell 'em to play 'Nancy Lee'!" he would bellow down the length of the table to his wife, while the musicians were in the midst of the "Toreador" song, perhaps. "Ask that fellow if they don't know 'Nancy Lee'!" And when the leader would shake his head apologetically in answer to an obedient shriek from Mrs. Sheridan, the "Toreador" continuing vehemently, Sheridan would roar half-remembered fragments of "Nancy Lee," naturally mingling some Bizet with the air of that uxorious tribute.

"Oh, there she stands and waves her hands while I'm away!
"A sail-er's wife a sail-er's star should be! Yo ho, oh, oh!
"Oh, Nancy, Nancy, Nancy Lee! Oh, Na-hancy Lee!

"*Hay*, there, old lady!" he would bellow. "Tell 'em to play 'In the Gloaming.' *In the gloaming, oh, my darling, la-la-lum-tee*—— Well, if they don't know that, what's the matter with 'Larboard Watch, Ahoy'? *That's* good music! That's the kind o' music *I* like! Come on, now! Mrs. Callin, get 'em singin' down in your part o' the table. What's the matter you folks down there, anyway? Larboard watch, ahoy!

"*What joy he feels, as—ta-tum-dum-tee-dee-dum steals. La-a-r-board watch, ahoy!*"

No external bubbling contributed to this effervescence: the Sheridans' table had never borne wine, and, more because of timidity about it than conviction, it bore none now; though "mineral waters" were copiously poured from bottles wrapped, for some reason, in napkins, and proved wholly satisfactory to almost all of the guests. And certainly no wine could have inspired more turbulent good spirits in the host. Not even Bibbs was an alloy in this night's happiness, for, as Mrs. Sheridan had said, he had "plans for Bibbs"—plans which were going to straighten out some things that had gone wrong.

So he pounded the table and boomed his echoes of old songs, and then, forgetting these, would renew his friendly railleries, or perhaps, turning to Mary Vertrees, who sat near him, round the corner of the table at his right, he would become autobiographical. Gentlemen less naïve than he had paid her that tribute, for she was a girl who inspired the autobiographical impulse in every man who met her—it needed but the sight of her.

The dinner seemed, somehow, to centre about Mary Vertrees and the jocund host as a play centres about its hero and heroine; they were the rubicund king and the starry princess of this spectacle—they paid court to each other, and everybody paid court to them. Down near the sugar Pump Works, where Bibbs sat, there was audible speculation and admiration. "Wonder who that lady is—makin' such a hit with the old man." "Must be some heiress." "Heiress? Golly, I guess I could stand it to marry rich, then!"

Edith and Sibyl were radiant: at first they had watched Miss Vertrees with an almost haggard anxiety, wondering what disastrous effect Sheridan's pastoral gaieties—and other things—would have upon her, but she seemed delighted with everything, and with him most of all. She treated him as if he were some delicious, foolish old joke that she understood perfectly, laughing at him almost violently when he bragged —probably his first experience of that kind in his life. It enchanted him.

As he proclaimed to the table, she had "a way with her." She had, indeed, as Roscoe Sheridan, upon her right, discovered just after the feast began. Since his marriage three years before, no lady had bestowed upon him so protracted a full view of brilliant eyes; and, with the look, his lovely neighbour said—and it was her first speech to him—

"I hope you're very susceptible, Mr. Sheridan!"

Honest Roscoe was taken aback, and, "Why?" was all he managed to say.

She repeated the look deliberately, which was noted, with a mystification equal to his own, by his sister across the table. No one, reflected Edith, could imagine Mary Vertrees the sort of girl who would "really flirt" with married men—she was obviously the "opposite of all that." Edith defined her as a "thoroughbred," a "nice girl"; and the look given to Roscoe was astounding. Roscoe's wife saw it, too, and she was another whom it puzzled—though not because its recipient was married.

"Because!" said Mary Vertrees, replying to Roscoe's monosyllable. "And also because we're next-door neighbours at table, and it's dull times ahead for both of us if we don't get along."

Roscoe was a literal young man, all stocks and bonds, and he had been brought up to believe that when a man married he "married and settled down." It was "all right," he felt, for a man as old as his father to pay florid compliments to as pretty a girl as this Miss Vertrees, but for himself—"a young married man"—it wouldn't do; it wouldn't even be quite

moral. He knew that young married people might have friendships, like his wife's for Lamhorn; but Sibyl and Lamhorn never "flirted"—they were always very matter-of-fact with each other. Roscoe would have been troubled if Sibyl had ever told Lamhorn she hoped he was susceptible.

"Yes—we're neighbours," he said, awkwardly.

"Next-door neighbours in houses, too," she added.

"No, not exactly. I live across the street."

"Why, no!" she exclaimed, and seemed startled. "Your mother told me this afternoon that you lived at home."

"Yes, of course I live at home. I built that new house across the street."

"But you——" She paused, confused, and then slowly a deep colour came into her cheek. "But I understood——"

"No," he said; "my wife and I lived with the old folks the first year, but that's all. Edith and Jim live with them, of course."

"I—I see," she said, the deep colour still deepening as she turned from him and saw, written upon a card before the gentleman at her left, the name, "Mr. James Sheridan, Jr." And from that moment Roscoe had little enough cause for wondering what he ought to reply to her disturbing coquetries.

Mr. James Sheridan had been anxiously waiting for the dazzling visitor to "get through with old Roscoe," as he thought of it, and give a bachelor a chance. "Old Roscoe" was the younger, but he had always been the steady wheelhorse of the family. Jim was "steady" enough, but was considered livelier than Roscoe, which in truth is not saying much for Jim's liveliness. As their father habitually boasted, both brothers were "capable, hard-working young business men," and the principal difference between them was merely that which resulted from Jim's being still a bachelor. Physically they were of the same type: dark of eyes and of hair, fresh-coloured and thick-set, and though Roscoe was several inches taller than Jim, neither was of the height, breadth, or depth of the father. Both wore young business men's mous-

taches, and either could have sat for the tailor-shop lithographs of young business men wearing "rich suitings in dark mixtures."

Jim, approving warmly of his neighbour's profile, perceived her access of colour, which increased his approbation. "What's that old Roscoe saying to you, Miss Vertrees?" he asked. "These young married men are mighty forward nowadays, but you mustn't let 'em make you blush."

"Am I blushing?" she said. "Are you sure?" And with that she gave him ample opportunity to make sure, repeating with interest the look wasted upon Roscoe. "I think you must be mistaken," she continued. "I think it's your brother who is blushing. I've thrown him into confusion."

"How?"

She laughed, and then, leaning to him a little, said in a tone as confidential as she could make it, under cover of the uproar, "By trying to begin with him a courtship I meant for *you!*"

This might well be a style new to Jim; and it was. He supposed it a nonsensical form of badinage, and yet it took his breath. He realized that he wished what she said to be the literal truth, and he was instantly snared by that realization.

"By George!" he said. "I guess you're the kind of girl that can say anything—yes, and get away with it, too!"

She laughed again—in her way, so that he could not tell whether she was laughing at him or at herself or at the nonsense she was talking; and she said:

"But you see I don't care whether I get away with it or not. I wish you'd tell me frankly if you think I've got a chance to get away with *you?*"

"More like if you've got a chance to get away *from* me!" Jim was inspired to reply. "Not one in the world, especially after beginning by making fun of me like that."

"I mightn't be so much in fun as you think," she said, regarding him with sudden gravity.

"Well," said Jim, in simple honesty, "you're a funny girl!"

Her gravity continued an instant longer. "I may not turn out to be funny for *you*."

"So long as you turn out to be anything at all for me, I expect I can manage to be satisfied." And with that, to his own surprise, it was his turn to blush, whereupon she laughed again.

"Yes," he said, plaintively, not wholly lacking intuition, "I can see you're the sort of girl that would laugh the minute you see a man really means anything!"

"'Laugh'!" she cried, gaily. "Why, it might be a matter of life and death! But if you want tragedy, I'd better put the question at once, considering the mistake I made with your brother."

Jim was dazed. She seemed to be playing a little game of mockery and nonsense with him, but he had glimpses of a flashing danger in it; he was but too sensible of being outclassed, and had somewhere a consciousness that he could never quite know this giddy and alluring lady, no matter how long it pleased her to play with him. But he mightily wanted her to keep on playing with him.

"Put what question?" he said, breathlessly.

"As you are a new neighbour of mine and of my family," she returned, speaking slowly and with a cross-examiner's severity, "I think it would be well for me to know at once whether you are already walking out with any young lady or not. Mr. Sheridan, think well! Are you spoken for?"

"Not yet," he gasped. "Are you?"

"*No!*" she cried, and with that they both laughed again; and the pastime proceeded, increasing both in its gaiety and in its gravity.

Observing its continuance, Mr. Robert Lamhorn, opposite, turned from a lively conversation with Edith and remarked covertly to Sibyl that Miss Vertrees was "starting rather picturesquely with Jim." And he added languidly, "Do you suppose she *would?*"

For the moment Sibyl gave no sign of having heard him,

but seemed interested in the clasp of a long "rope" of pearls, a loop of which she was allowing to swing from her fingers, resting her elbow upon the table and following with her eyes the twinkle of diamonds and platinum in the clasp at the end of the loop. She wore many jewels. She was pretty, but hers was not the kind of prettiness to be loaded with too sumptuous accessories, and jewelled head-dresses are dangerous—they may emphasize the wrongness of the wrong wearer.

"I said Miss Vertrees seems to be starting pretty strong with Jim," repeated Mr. Lamhorn.

"I heard you." There was a latent discontent always somewhere in her eyes, no matter what she threw upon the surface to cover it, and just now she did not care to cover it; she looked sullen. "Starting any stronger than you did with Edith?" she inquired.

"Oh, keep the peace!" he said, crossly. "That's off, of course."

"You haven't been making her see it this evening—precisely," said Sibyl, looking at him steadily. "You've talked to her for——"

"For Heaven's sake," he begged, "keep the peace!"

"Well, what have you just been doing?"

"'*Sh!*" he said. "Listen to your father-in-law."

Sheridan was booming and braying louder than ever, the orchestra having begun to play "The Rosary," to his vast content.

"*I count them over, la-la-tum-tee-dum,*" he roared, beating the measures with his fork. "*Each hour a pearl, each pearl tee-dum-tum-dum*—— What's the matter of all you folks! Why'n't you *sing?* Miss Vertrees, I bet a thousand dollars *you* sing! Why'n't——"

"Mr. Sheridan," she said, turning cheerfully from the ardent Jim, "you don't know what you interrupted! Your son isn't used to my rough ways, and my soldier's wooing frightens him, but I think he was about to say something important."

"I'll say something important to him if he doesn't!" the

father threatened, more delighted with her than ever. "By gosh! if I was his age—or a widower right *now*——"

"Oh, wait!" cried Mary. "If they'd only make less noise! I want Mrs. Sheridan to hear."

"She'd say the same," he shouted. "She'd tell me I was mighty slow if I couldn't get ahead o' Jim. Why, when I was his age——"

"You must listen to your father," Mary interrupted, turning to Jim, who had grown red again. "He's going to tell us how, when he was your age, he made those two blades of grass grow out of a teacup—and you could see for yourself he didn't get them out of his sleeve!"

At that Sheridan pounded the table till it jumped. "Look here, young lady!" he roared. "Some o' these days I'm either goin' to slap you—or I'm goin' to kiss you!"

Edith looked aghast; she was afraid this was indeed "too awful," but Mary Vertrees burst into ringing laughter.

"Both!" she cried. "Both! The one to make me forget the other!"

"But which——" he began, and then suddenly gave forth such stentorian trumpetings of mirth that for once the whole table stopped to listen. "Jim," he roared, "if you don't propose to that girl to-night I'll send you back to the machine-shop with Bibbs!"

And Bibbs—down among the retainers by the sugar Pump Works, and watching Mary Vertrees as a ragged boy in the street might watch a rich little girl in a garden—Bibbs heard. He heard—and he knew what his father's plans were now.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. VERTREES "sat up" for her daughter, Mr. Vertrees having retired after a restless evening, not much soothed by the society of his Landseers. Mary had taken a key, insisting that he should not come for her and seeming confident that she would not lack for escort; nor did the sequel prove her confidence unwarranted. But Mrs. Vertrees had a long vigil of it.

She was not the woman to make herself easy—no servant had ever seen her in a wrapper—and with her hair and her dress and her shoes just what they had been when she returned from the afternoon's call, she sat through the slow night hours in a stiff little chair under the gaslight in her own room, which was directly over the "front hall." There, book in hand, she employed the time in her own reminiscences, though it was her belief that she was reading Madame de Rémusat's.

Her thoughts went backward into her life and into her husband's; and the deeper into the past they went, the brighter the pictures they brought her—and there is tragedy. Like her husband, she thought backward because she did not dare think forward definitely. What thinking forward this troubled couple ventured took the form of a slender hope which neither of them could have borne to hear put in words, and yet they had talked it over, day after day, from the very hour when they heard Sheridan was to build his New House next door. For—so quickly does any ideal of human behaviour become an antique—their youth was of the innocent old days, so dead! of "breeding" and "gentility," and no craft had been more straitly trained upon them than that of talking about things without mentioning them. Herein was marked the most vital difference between Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees and their big new

neighbour. Sheridan, though his youth was of the same epoch, knew nothing of such matters. He had been chopping wood for the morning fire in the country grocery while they were still dancing.

It was after one o'clock when Mrs. Vertrees heard steps and the delicate clinking of the key in the lock, and then, with the opening of the door, Mary's laugh and, "Yes—if you aren't afraid—to-morrow!"

The door closed, and she rushed upstairs, bringing with her a breath of cold and bracing air into her mother's room. "Yes." she said, before Mrs. Vertrees could speak, "he brought me home!"

She let her cloak fall upon the bed, and, drawing an old red-velvet rocking-chair forward, sat beside her mother, after giving her a light pat upon the shoulder and a hearty kiss upon the cheek.

"Mamma!" Mary exclaimed, when Mrs. Vertrees had expressed a hope that she had enjoyed the evening and had not caught cold. "Why don't you ask me?"

This inquiry obviously made her mother uncomfortable. "I don't——" she faltered. "Ask you what, Mary?"

"How I got along and what he's like."

"Mary!"

"Oh, it isn't distressing!" said Mary. "And I got along so fast——" She broke off to laugh; continuing then, "But that's the way I went at it, of course. We *are* in a hurry, aren't we?"

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Vertrees insisted, shaking her head plaintively.

"Yes," said Mary, "I'm going out in his car with him to-morrow afternoon, and to the theatre the next night—but I stopped it there. You see, after you give the first push, you must leave it to them while *you* pretend to run away!"

"My dear, I don't know what to——"

"What to make of anything!" Mary finished for her. "So that's all right! Now I'll tell you all about it. It was gorgeous and deafening and tee-total. We could have lived a year on it.

I'm not good at figures, but I calculated that if we lived six months on poor old Charlie and Ned and the station-wagon and the Victoria, we could manage at least twice as long on the cost of the 'house-warming.' I think the orchids alone would have lasted us a couple of months. There they were, before me, but I couldn't steal 'em and sell 'em, and so—well, so I did what I could."

She leaned back and laughed reassuringly to her troubled mother. "It seemed to be a success—what I could," she said, clasping her hands behind her neck and stirring the rocker to motion as a rhythmic accompaniment to her narrative. "The girl Edith and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan, were too anxious about the effect of things on me. The father's worth a bushel of both of them, if they knew it. He's what he is. I like him." She paused reflectively, continuing, "Edith's 'interested' in that Lamhorn boy; he's good-looking and not stupid, but I think he's——" She interrupted herself with a cheery outcry: "Oh! I mustn't be calling him names! If he's trying to make Edith like him, I ought to respect him as a colleague."

"I don't understand a thing you're talking about," Mrs. Vertrees complained.

"All the better! Well, he's a bad lot, that Lamhorn boy; everybody's always known that, but the Sheridans don't know the everybodies that know. He sat between Edith and Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan. *She's* like those people you wondered about at the theatre, the last time we went—dressed in ball-gowns; bound to show their clothes and jewels *some*where! She flatters the father, and so did I, for that matter—but not that way. I treated him outrageously!"

"Mary!"

"That's what flattered him. After dinner he made the whole regiment of us follow him all over the house, while he lectured like a guide on the Palatine. He gave dimensions and costs, and the whole b'ilin' of 'em listened as if they thought he intended to make them a present of the house. What he was proudest of was the plumbing and that Bay of Naples

panorama in the hall. He made us look at all the plumbing—bath-rooms and everywhere else—and then he made us look at the Bay of Naples. He said it was a hundred and eleven feet long, but I think it's more. And he led us all into the ready-made library to see a poem Edith had taken a prize with at school. They'd had it printed in gold letters and framed in mother-of-pearl. But the poem itself was rather simple and wistful and nice—he read it to us, though Edith tried to stop him. She was modest about it, and said she'd never written anything else. And then, after a while, Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan asked me to come across the street to her house with them—her husband and Edith and Mr. Lamhorn and Jim Sheridan——"

Mrs. Vertrees was shocked. "'Jim'!" she exclaimed. "Mary, *please*——"

"Of course," said Mary. "I'll make it as easy for you as I can, mamma. Mr. James Sheridan, Junior. We went over there, and Mrs. Roscoe explained that 'the men were all dying for a drink,' though I noticed that Mr. Lamhorn was the only one near death's door on that account. Edith and Mrs. Roscoe said they knew I'd been bored at the dinner. They were objectionably apologetic about it, and they seemed to think *now* we were going to have a 'good time' to make up for it. But I hadn't been bored at the dinner, I'd been amused; and the 'good time' at Mrs. Roscoe's was horribly, horribly stupid."

"But, Mary," her mother began, "is—is——" And she seemed unable to complete the question.

"Never mind, mamma, *I'll* say it. Is Mr. James Sheridan, Junior, stupid? I'm sure he's not at all stupid about business. Otherwise—— Oh, what right have I to be calling people 'stupid' because they're not exactly my kind? On the big dinner-table they had enormous icing models of the Sheridan Building——"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Vertrees cried. "Surely not!"

"Yes, and two other things of that kind—I don't know what. But, after all, I wondered if they were so bad. If I'd

been at a dinner at a palace in Italy, and a relief or inscription of one of the old silver pieces had referred to some great deed or achievement of the family, I shouldn't have felt superior; I'd have thought it picturesque and stately—I'd have been impressed. And what's the real difference? The icing is temporary, and that's much more modest, isn't it? And why is it vulgar to feel important more on account of something you've done yourself than because of something one of your ancestors did? Besides, if we go back a few generations, we've all got such hundreds of ancestors it seems idiotic to go picking out one or two to be proud of ourselves about. Well, then, mamma, I managed not to feel superior to Mr. James Sheridan, Junior, because he didn't see anything out of place in the Sheridan Building in sugar."

Mrs. Vertrees's expression had lost none of its anxiety pending the conclusion of this lively bit of analysis, and she shook her head gravely. "My dear, dear child," she said, "it seems to me—— It looks—— I'm afraid——"

"Say as much of it as you can, mamma," said Mary, encouragingly. "I can get it, if you'll just give me one keyword."

"Everything you say," Mrs. Vertrees began, timidly, "seems to have the air of—— It is as if you were seeking to—to make yourself——"

"Oh, I see! You mean I sound as if I were trying to force myself to like him."

"Not exactly, Mary. That wasn't quite what I meant," said Mrs. Vertrees, speaking direct untruth with perfect unconsciousness "But you said that—that you found the latter part of the evening at young Mrs. Sheridan's unentertaining——"

"And as Mr. James Sheridan was there, and I saw more of him than at dinner, and had a horribly stupid time in spite of that, you think I——" And then it was Mary who left the deduction unfinished.

Mrs. Vertrees nodded; and though both the mother and

the daughter understood, Mary felt it better to make the understanding definite.

"Well," she asked, gravely, "is there anything else I can do? You and papa don't want me to do anything that distresses me, and so, as this is the only thing to be done, it seems it's up to me not to let it distress me. That's all there is about it, isn't it?"

"But nothing *must* distress you!" the mother cried.

"That's what I say!" said Mary, cheerfully. "And so it doesn't. It's all right." She rose and took her cloak over her arm, as if to go to her own room. But on the way to the door she stopped, and stood leaning against the foot of the bed, contemplating a threadbare rug at her feet. "Mother, you've told me a thousand times that it doesn't really matter whom a girl marries."

"No, no!" Mrs. Vertrees protested. "I never said such a——"

"No, not in words; I mean what you *meant*. It's true, isn't it, that marriage really is 'not a bed of roses, but a field of battle'? To get right down to it, a girl could fight it out with anybody, couldn't she? One man as well as another?"

"Oh, my dear! I'm sure your father and I——"

"Yes, yes," said Mary, indulgently. "I don't mean you and papa. But isn't it propinquity that makes marriages? So many people say so, there must be something in it."

"Mary, I can't bear for you to talk like that." And Mrs. Vertrees lifted pleading eyes to her daughter—eyes that begged to be spared. "It sounds—almost reckless!"

Mary caught the appeal, came to her, and kissed her gaily. "Never fret, dear! I'm not likely to do anything I don't want to—I've always been too thorough-going a little pig! And if it *is* propinquity that does our choosing for us, well, at least no girl in the world could ask for more of *that!* How could there be any more propinquity than the very house next door?"

She gave her mother a final kiss and went gaily all the way

to the door this time, pausing for her postscript with her hand on the knob. "Oh, the one that caught me looking in the window, mamma, the youngest one——"

"Did he speak of it?" Mrs. Vertrees asked, apprehensively.

"No. He didn't speak at all, that I saw, to anyone. I didn't meet him. But he isn't insane, I'm sure; or if he is, he has long intervals when he's not. Mr. James Sheridan mentioned that he lived at home when he was 'well enough'; and it may be he's only an invalid. He looks dreadfully ill, but he has pleasant eyes, and it struck me that if—if one were in the Sheridan family"—she laughed a little ruefully—"he might he interesting to talk to sometimes, when there was too much stocks and bonds. I didn't see him after dinner."

"There must be something wrong with him," said Mrs. Vertrees. "They'd have introduced him if there weren't."

"I don't know. He's been ill so much and away so much—sometimes people like that just don't seem to 'count' in a family. His father spoke of sending him back to a machine-shop of some sort; I suppose he meant when the poor thing gets better. I glanced at him just then, when Mr. Sheridan mentioned him, and he happened to be looking straight at me; and he was pathetic-looking enough before that, but the most tragic change came over him. He seemed just to die, right there at the table!"

"You mean when his father spoke of sending him to the shop place?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Sheridan must be very unfeeling."

"No," said Mary, thoughtfully, "I don't think he is; but he might be uncomprehending, and certainly he's the kind of man to do anything he once sets out to do. But I wish I hadn't been looking at that poor boy just then! I'm afraid I'll keep remembering——"

"I wouldn't." Mrs. Vertrees smiled faintly, and in her smile there was the remotest ghost of a genteel roguishness. "I'd keep my mind on pleasanter things, Mary."

Mary laughed and nodded. "Yes, indeed! Plenty pleasant

enough, and probably, if all were known, too good—even for me!"

And when she had gone Mrs. Vertrees drew a long breath, as if a burden were off her mind, and, smiling, began to undress in a gentle reverie.

CHAPTER VII

EDITH, glancing casually into the "ready-made" library, stopped abruptly, seeing Bibbs there alone. He was standing before the pearl-framed and golden-lettered poem, musingly inspecting it. He read it:

FUGITIVE

I will forget the things that sting:
The lashing look, the barbèd word.
I know the very hands that fling
The stones at me had never stirred
To anger but for their own scars.
They've suffered so, that's why they strike.
I'll keep my heart among the stars
Where none shall hunt it out. Oh, like
These wounded ones I must not be,
For, wounded, I might strike in turn!
So, none shall hurt me. Far and free
Where my heart flies no one shall learn.

"Bibbs!" Edith's voice was angry, and her colour deepened suddenly as she came into the room, preceded by a scent of violets much more powerful than that warranted by the actual bunch of them upon the lapel of her coat.

Bibbs did not turn his head, but wagged it solemnly, seeming depressed by the poem. "Pretty young, isn't it?" he said. "There must have been something about your looks that got the prize, Edith; I can't believe the poem did it."

She glanced hurriedly over her shoulder and spoke sharply but in a low voice: "I don't think it's very nice of you to bring it up at all, Bibbs. I'd like a chance to forget the whole silly business. *I* didn't want them to frame it, and I wish to goodness papa'd quit talking about it; but here, that night, after the dinner, didn't he go and read it aloud to the whole

crowd of 'em! And then they all wanted to know what other poems I'd written, and why I didn't keep it up and write some more, and if I didn't, why didn't I, and why this and why that, till I thought I'd die of shame!"

"You could tell 'em you had writer's cramp," Bibbs suggested.

"I couldn't tell 'em anything! I just choke with mortification every time anybody speaks of the thing."

Bibbs looked grieved. "The poem isn't *that* bad, Edith. You see, you were only seventeen when you wrote it."

"Oh, hush up!" she snapped. "I wish it had burnt my fingers the first time I touched it. Then I might have had sense enough to leave it where it was. I had no business to take it, and I've been ashamed——"

"No, no," he said, comfortingly. "It was the very most flattering thing ever happened to me. It was almost my last flight before I went to the machine-shop, and it's pleasant to think somebody liked it enough to——"

"But I *don't* like it!" she exclaimed. "I don't even understand it—and papa made so much fuss over its getting the prize, I just hate it! The truth is I never dreamed it'd get the prize."

"Maybe they expected father to endow the school," Bibbs murmured.

"Well, I had to have something to turn in, and I couldn't write a *line!* I hate poetry, anyhow, and Bobby Lamhorn's always teasing me about how I 'keep my heart among the stars.' He makes it seem such a mushy kind of thing, the way he says it. I hate it!"

"You'll have to live it down, Edith. Perhaps abroad and under another name you might find——"

"Oh, hush up! I'll hire someone to steal it and burn it the first chance I get." She turned away petulantly, moving to the door. "I'd like to think I could hope to hear the last of it before I die!"

"Edith!" he called, as she went into the hall.

"What's the matter?"

"I want to ask you: Do I really look better, or have you just got used to me?"

"What on earth do you mean?" she said, coming back as far as the threshold.

"When I first came you couldn't look at me," Bibbs explained, in his impersonal way. "But I've noticed you look at me lately. I wondered if I'd——"

"It's because you look so much better," she told him, cheerfully. "This month you've been here's done you no end of good. It's the change."

"Yes, that's what they said at the sanitarium—the change."

"You look worse than 'most anybody *I* ever saw," said Edith, with supreme candour. "But I don't know much about it. I've never seen a corpse in my life, and I've never even seen anybody that was terribly sick, so you mustn't judge by me. I only know you do look better, I'm glad to say. But you're right about my not being able to look at you at first. You had a kind of whiteness that—— Well, you're almost as thin, I suppose, but you've got more just ordinarily pale; not that ghastly look. Anybody could look at you now, Bibbs, and not —not get——"

"Sick?"

"Well—almost that!" she laughed. "And you're getting a better colour every day, Bibbs; you really are. You're really getting along splendidly."

"I—I'm afraid so," he said, ruefully.

"'Afraid so'! Well, if you aren't the queerest! I suppose you mean father might send you back to the machine-shop if you get well enough. I heard him say something about it the night of the——" The jingle of a distant bell interrupted her, and she glanced at her wtach. "Bobby Lamhorn! I'm going to motor him out to look at a place in the country. Afternoon, Bibbs!"

When she had gone, Bibbs mooned pessimistically from shelf to shelf, his eye wandering among the titles of the books. The library consisted almost entirely of handsome "uniform

editions": Irving, Poe, Cooper, Goldsmith, Scott, Byron, Burns, Longfellow, Tennyson, Hume, Gibbon, Prescott, Thackeray, Dickens, De Musset, Balzac, Gautier, Flaubert, Goethe, Schiller, Dante, and Tasso. There were shelves and shelves of encyclopædias, of anthologies, of "famous classics," of "Oriental masterpieces," of "masterpieces of oratory," and more shelves of "selected libraries" of "literature," of "the drama," and of "modern science." They made an effective decoration for the room, all these big, expensive books, with a glossy binding here and there twinkling a reflection of the flames that crackled in the splendid Gothic fireplace; but Bibbs had an impression that the bookseller who selected them considered them a relief, and that white-jacket considered them a burden of dust, and that nobody else considered them at all. Himself, he disturbed not one.

There came a chime of bells from a clock in another part of the house, and white-jacket appeared beamingly in the doorway, bearing furs. "Aw ready, Mist' Bibbs," he announced. "You' ma say wrap up wawm f' you' ride, an' she cain' go with you to-day, an' not f'git go see you' pa at fo' 'clock. Aw ready, suh."

He equipped Bibbs for the daily drive Dr. Gurney had commanded; and in the manner of a master of ceremonies unctuously led the way. In the hall they passed the Moor, and Bibbs paused before it while white-jacket opened the door with a flourish and waved condescendingly to the chauffeur in the car which stood waiting in the driveway.

"It seems to me I asked you what you thought about this 'statue' when I first came home, George," said Bibbs, thoughtfully. "What did you tell me?"

"Yessuh!" George chuckled, perfectly understanding that for some unknown reason Bibbs enjoyed hearing him repeat his opinion of the Moor. "You ast me when you firs' come home, an' you ast me nex' day, an' mighty near ev'y day all time you been here; an' las' Sunday you ast me twicet." He shook his head solemnly. "Look to me mus' be somep'm mighty lam*idal* 'bout 'at statue!"

"Mighty what?"

"Mighty lami*dal!*" George burst out laughing. "What *do* 'at word mean, Mist' Bibbs?"

"It's new to me, George. Where did you hear it?"

"I nev' *did* hear it!" said George. "I uz dess sittin' thinkum to myse'f an' she pop in my head—'lami*dal*,' dess like 'at! An' she soun' so good, seem like she *gotta* mean somep'm!"

"Come to think of it, I believe she does mean something. Why, yes——"

"Do she?" cried George. "*What* she mean?"

"It's exactly the word for the statue," said Bibbs, with conviction, as he climbed into the car. "It's a lami*dal* statue."

"Hiyi!" George exulted. "Man! Man! Listen! Well, suh, she mighty lami*dal* statue, but lami*dal* statue heap o' trouble to dus'!"

"I expect she is!" said Bibbs, as the engine began to churn; and a moment later he was swept from sight.

George turned to Mist' Jackson, who had been listening benevolently in the hallway. "Same he aw-ways say, Mist' Jackson—'I expec' she is!' Ev'y day he try t' git me talk 'bout 'at lami*dal* statue, an' aw-ways, las' thing *he* say, 'I expec' she is!' You know, Mist' Jackson, if he git well, 'at young man go' be pride o' the family, Mist' Jackson. Yessuh, right now I pick 'im fo' firs' money!"

"Look out with all 'at money, George!" Jackson warned the enthusiast. "White folks 'n 'is house know 'im heap longer 'n you. You the on'y man bettin' on 'im!"

"I risk it!" cried George, merrily. "I put her all on now—ev'y cent! 'At boy's go' be flower o' the flock!"

This singular prophecy, founded somewhat recklessly upon gratitude for the meaning of "lami*dal*," differed radically from another prediction concerning Bibbs, set forth for the benefit of a fair auditor some twenty minutes later. Jim Sheridan, skirting the edges of the town with Mary Vertrees beside him, in his own swift machine, encountered the invalid upon the highroad. The two cars were going in opposite directions, and the occupants of Jim's had only a swaying

glimpse of Bibbs sitting alone on the back seat—his white face startlingly white against cap and collar of black fur—but he flashed into recognition as Mary bowed to him.

Jim waved his left hand carelessly. "It's Bibbs, taking his constitutional," he explained.

"Yes, I know," said Mary. "I bowed to him, too, though I've never met him. In fact, I've only seen him once—no, twice. I hope he won't think I'm very bold, bowing to him."

"I doubt if he noticed it," said honest Jim.

"Oh, oh!" she cried.

"What's the trouble?"

"I'm almost sure people notice it when I bow to them."

"Oh, I see!" said Jim. "Of course they would ordinarily, but Bibbs is funny."

"Is he? How?" she asked. "He strikes me as anything but funny."

"Well, I'm his brother," Jim said, deprecatingly, "but *I* don't know what he's like, and, to tell the truth, I've never felt exactly like I *was* his brother, the way I do Roscoe. Bibbs never did seem more than half alive to me. Of course Roscoe and I are older, and when we were boys we were too big to play with him, but he never played anyway, with boys his own age. He'd rather just sit in the house and mope around by himself. Nobody could ever get him to *do* anything; you can't get him to do anything now. He never had any *life* in him; and honestly, if he is my brother, I must say I believe Bibbs Sheridan is the laziest man God ever made! Father put him in the machine-shop over at the Pump Works—best thing in the world for him—and he was just plain no account. It made him sick! If he'd had the right kind of energy—the kind father's got, for instance, or Roscoe, either—why, it wouldn't made him sick. And suppose it was either of them, —yes, or me, either—do you think any of us would have stopped if we *were* sick? Not much! I hate to say it, but Bibbs Sheridan 'll never amount to anything as long as he lives."

Mary looked thoughtful. "Is there any particular reason why he should?" she asked.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean that, do you? Don't you believe in a man's knowing how to earn his salt, no matter how much money his father's got? Hasn't the business of this world got to be carried on by everybody in it? Are we going to lay back on what we've got and see other fellows get ahead of us? If we've got big things already, isn't it every man's business to go ahead and make 'em bigger? Isn't it his duty? Don't we always want to get bigger and bigger?"

"Ye-es—I don't know. But I feel rather sorry for your brother. He looked so lonely—and sick."

"He's gettin' better every day," Jim said. "Dr. Gurney says so. There's nothing much the matter with him, really—it's nine-tenths imaginary. 'Nerves!' People that are willing to be busy don't have nervous diseases, because they don't have time to imagine 'em."

"You mean his trouble is really mental?"

"Oh, he's not a lunatic," said Jim. "He's just queer. Sometimes he'll say something right bright, but half the time what he says is 'way off the subject, or else there isn't any sense to it at all. For instance, the other day I heard him talkin' to one of the darkies in the hall. The darkey asked him what time he wanted the car for his drive, and anybody else in the world would have just said what time they *did* want it, and that would have been all there was to it; but here's what Bibbs says, and I heard him with my own ears. 'What time do I want the car?' he says. 'Well, now, that depends—that depends,' he says. He talks slow like that, you know. 'I'll tell you what time I want the car, George,' he says, 'if you'll tell *me* what you think of this statue!' That's exactly his words! Asked the darkey what he thought of that Arab Edith and mother bought for the hall!"

Mary pondered upon this. "He might have been in fun, perhaps," she suggested.

"Askin' a darkey what he thought of a piece of statuary—of a work of art! Where on earth would be the fun of that?

No, you're just kind-hearted—and that's the way you *ought* to be, of course——"

"Thank you, Mr. Sheridan!" she laughed.

"See here!" he cried. "Isn't there any way for us to get over this Mister and Miss thing? A month's got thirty-one days in it; I've managed to be with you a part of pretty near all the thirty-one, and I think you know how I feel by this time——"

She looked panic-stricken immediately. "Oh, no," she protested, quickly. "No, I don't, and——"

"Yes, you do," he said, and his voice shook a little. "You couldn't help knowing."

"But I do!" she denied, hurriedly. "I do help knowing. I mean—— Oh, wait!"

"What for? You do know how I feel, and you—well, you've certainly *wanted* me to feel that way—or else pretended——"

"Now, now!" she lamented. "You're spoiling such a cheerful afternoon!"

"'Spoiling' it!" He slowed down the car and turned his face to her squarely. "See here, Miss Vertrees, haven't you——"

"Stop! Stop the car a minute." And when he had complied she faced him as squarely as he evidently desired her to face him. "Listen. I don't want you to go on, to-day."

"Why not?" he asked, sharply.

"I don't know."

"You mean it's just a whim?"

"I don't know," she repeated. Her voice was low and troubled and honest, and she kept her clear eyes upon his.

"Will you tell me something?"

"Almost anything."

"Have you ever told any man you loved him?"

And at that, though she laughed, she looked a little contemptuous. "No," she said. "And I don't think I ever shall tell any man that—or ever know what it means. I'm in earnest, Mr. Sheridan."

"Then you—you've just been flirting with me!" Poor Jim looked both furious and crestfallen.

"Not one bit!" she cried. "Not one word! Not one syllable! I've meant every single thing!"

"I don't——"

"Of course you don't!" she said. "Now, Mr. Sheridan, I want you to start the car. Now! Thank you. Slowly, till I finish what I want to say. I have not flirted with you. I have deliberately courted you. One thing more, and then I want you to take me straight home, talking about the weather all the way. I said that I do not believe I shall ever 'care' for any man, and that is true. I doubt the existence of the kind of 'caring' we hear about in poems and plays and novels. I think it must be just a kind of emotional *talk*—most of it. At all events, I don't feel it. Now, we can go faster, please."

"Just where does that let me out?" he demanded. "How does that excuse you for——"

"It isn't an excuse," she said, gently, and gave him one final look, wholly desolate. "I haven't said I should never marry."

"What?" Jim gasped.

She inclined her head in a broken sort of acquiescence, very humble, unfathomably sorrowful.

"I promise nothing," she said, faintly.

"You needn't!" shouted Jim, radiant and exultant. "You needn't! By George! I know you're square; that's enough for me! You wait and promise whenever you're ready!"

"Don't forget what I asked," she begged him.

"Talk about the weather? I will! God bless the old weather!" cried the happy Jim.

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH the open country Bibbs was borne flying between brown fields and sun-flecked groves of gray trees, to breathe the rushing, clean air beneath a glorious sky—that sky so despised in the city, and so maltreated there, that from early October to mid-May it was impossible for men to remember that blue is the rightful colour overhead.

Upon each of Bibbs's cheeks there was a hint of something almost resembling a pinkishness; not actual colour, but undeniably its phantom. How largely this apparition may have been the work of the wind upon his face it is difficult to calculate, for beyond a doubt it was partly the result of a lady's bowing to him upon no more formal introduction than the circumstance of his having caught her looking into his window a month before. She had bowed definitely; she had bowed charmingly. And it seemed to Bibbs that she must have meant to convey her forgiveness.

There had been something in her recognition of him unfamiliar to his experience, and he rode the warmer for it. Nor did he lack the impression that he would long remember her as he had just seen her: her veil tumultuously blowing back, her face glowing in the wind—and that look of gay friendliness tossed to him like a fresh rose in carnival.

By and by, upon a rising ground, the driver halted the car, then backed and tacked, and sent it forward again with its nose to the south and the smoke. Far before him Bibbs saw the great smudge upon the horizon, that nest of cloud in which the city strove and panted like an engine shrouded in its own steam. But to Bibbs, who had now to go to the very heart of it, for a commanded interview with his father, the distant cloud was like an implacable genius issuing thunderously in smoke from his enchanted bottle, and irresistibly drawing Bibbs nearer and nearer.

They passed from the farm lands, and came, in the amber light of November late afternoon, to the farthermost outskirts of the city; and here the sky shimmered upon the verge of change from blue to gray; the smoke did not visibly permeate the air, but it was there, nevertheless—impalpable, thin, no more than the dust of smoke. And then, as the car drove on, the chimneys and stacks of factories came swimming up into view like miles of steamers advancing abreast, every funnel with its vast plume, savage and black, sweeping to the horizon, dripping wealth and dirt and suffocation over league on league already rich and vile with grime.

The sky had become only a dingy thickening of the soiled air; and a roar and clangour of metals beat deafeningly on Bibbs's ears. And now the car passed two great blocks of long brick buildings, hideous in all ways possible to make them hideous; doorways showing dark one moment and lurid the next with the leap of some virulent interior flame, revealing blackened giants, half naked, in passionate action, struggling with formless things in the hot illumination. And big as these shops were, they were growing bigger, spreading over a third block, where two new structures were mushrooming to completion in some hasty cement process of a stability not overreassuring. Bibbs pulled the rug closer about him, and not even the phantom of colour was left upon his cheeks as he passed this place, for he knew it too well. Across the face of one of the buildings there was an enormous sign: "Sheridan Automatic Pump Co., Inc."

Thence they went through streets of wooden houses, all grimed, and adding their own grime from many a sooty chimney; flimsy wooden houses of a thousand flimsy whimsies in the fashioning, built on narrow lots and nudging one another crossly, shutting out the stingy sunlight from one another; bad neighbours who would destroy one another root and branch some night when the right wind blew. They were only waiting for that wind and a cigarette, and then they would all be gone together—a pinch of incense burned upon the tripod of the god.

Along these streets there were skinny shade-trees, and here and there a forest elm or walnut had been left; but these were dying. Some people said it was the scale; some said it was the smoke; and some were sure that asphalt and "improving" the streets did it; but Bigness was in too Big a hurry to bother much about trees. He had telegraph-poles and telephone-poles and electric-light poles and trolley-poles by the thousand to take their places. So he let the trees die and put up his poles. They were hideous, but nobody minded that; and sometimes the wires fell and killed people—but not often enough to matter at all.

Thence onward the car bore Bibbs through the older parts of the town where the few solid old houses not already demolished were in transition; some, with their fronts torn away, were being made into segments of apartment-buildings; others had gone uproariously into trade, brazenly putting forth "show-windows" on their first floors, seeming to mean it for a joke; one or two with unaltered façades peeped humorously over the tops of temporary office buildings of one story erected in the old front yards. Altogether, the town here was like a boarding-house hash the Sunday after Thanksgiving; the old ingredients were discernible.

This was the fringe of Bigness's own sanctuary, and now Bibbs reached the roaring holy of holies itself. The car must stop at every crossing while the dark-garbed crowds, enveloped in maelstroms of dust, hurried before it. Magnificent new buildings, already dingy, loomed hundreds of feet above him; newer ones, more magnificent, were rising beside them, rising higher; old buildings were coming down; middle-aged buildings were coming down; the streets were laid open to their entrails and men worked underground between palisades and overhead in metal cobwebs like spiders in the sky. Trolley-cars and long interurban cars, built to split the wind like torpedo-boats, clanged and shrieked their way round swarming corners; motor-cars of every kind and shape known to man babbled frightful warnings and frantic demands; hospital ambulances clamoured wildly for passage; steam-whistles

signalled the swinging of titanic tentacle and claw; riveters rattled like machine-guns; the ground shook to the thunder of gigantic trucks; and the conglomerate sound of it all was the sound of earthquake playing accompaniments for battle and sudden death. On one of the new steel buildings no work was being done that afternoon. The building had killed a man in the morning—and the steel-workers always stop for the day when that "happens."

And in the hurrying crowds, swirling and sifting through the brobdingnagian camp of iron and steel, one saw the camp-followers and the pagan women—there would be work to-day and dancing to-night. For the Puritan's dry voice is but the crackling of a leaf underfoot in the rush and roar of the coming of the new Egypt.

Bibbs was on time. He knew it must be "to the minute" or his father would consider it an outrage; and the big chronometer in Sheridan's office marked four precisely when Bibbs walked in. Coincidentally with his entrance five people who had been at work in the office, under Sheridan's direction, walked out. They departed upon no visible or audible suggestion, and with a promptness that seemed ominous to the newcomer. As the massive door clicked softly behind the elderly stenographer, the last of the procession, Bibbs had a feeling that they all understood that he was a failure as a great man's son, a disappointment, the "queer one" of the family, and that he had been summoned to judgment—a well-founded impression, for that was exactly what they understood.

"Sit down," said Sheridan.

It is frequently an advantage for deans, school-masters, and worried fathers to place delinquents in the sitting posture. Bibbs sat.

Sheridan, standing, gazed enigmatically upon his son for a period of silence, then walked slowly to a window and stood looking out of it, his big hands, loosely hooked together by the thumbs, behind his back. They were soiled, as were all other hands downtown, except such as might be still damp from a basin.

"Well, Bibbs," he said at last, not altering his attitude, "do you know what I'm goin' to do with you?"

Bibbs, leaning back in his chair, fixed his eyes contemplatively upon the ceiling. "I heard you tell Jim," he began, in his slow way. "You said you'd send him to the machine-shop with me if he didn't propose to Miss Vertrees. So I suppose that must be your plan for me. But——"

"But what?" said Sheridan, irritably, as the son paused.

"Isn't there somebody you'd let *me* propose to?"

That brought his father sharply round to face him. "You beat the devil! Bibbs, what *is* the matter with you? Why can't you be like anybody else?"

"Liver, maybe," said Bibbs, gently.

"Boh! Even ole Doc Gurney says there's nothin' wrong with you organically. No. You're a dreamer, Bibbs; that's what's the matter, and that's *all* the matter. Oh, not one o' these *big* dreamers that put through the big deals! No, sir! You're the kind o' dreamer that just sets out on the back fence and thinks about how much trouble there must be in the world! That ain't the kind that builds the bridges, Bibbs; it's the kind that borrows fifteen cents from his wife's uncle's brother-in-law to get ten cents' worth o' plug tobacco and a nickel's worth o' quinine!"

He put the finishing touch to this etching with a snort, and turned again to the window.

"Look out there!" he bade his son. "Look out o' that window! Look at the life and energy down there! I should think *any* young man's blood would tingle to get into it and be part of it. Look at the big things young men are doin' in this town!" He swung about, coming to the mahogany desk in the middle of the room. "Look at what *I* was doin' at your age! Look at what your own brothers are doin'! Look at Roscoe! Yes, and look at Jim! I made Jim president o' the Sheridan Realty Company last New Year's, with charge of every inch o' ground and every brick and every shingle and stick o' wood we own; and it's an example to any young man—or ole man, either—the way he took ahold of it. Last July we found

out we wanted two more big warehouses at the Pump Works —wanted 'em quick. Contractors said it couldn't be done; said nine or ten months at the soonest; couldn't see it any other way. What'd Jim do? Took the contract himself; found a fellow with a new cement and concrete process, kept men on the job night and day, and stayed on it night and day himself—and, by George—! we begin to *use* them warehouses next week! Four months and a half, and every inch fireproof! I tell you Jim's one o' these fellers that make miracles happen! Now, I don't say every young man can be like Jim, because there's mighty few got his ability, but every young man can go in and do his share. Look at Dan Oliphant. 'This town is God's own country,' he says; and he's right. This town *is* God's own country, and there's opportunity for anybody with a pound of energy and an ounce o' gumption. I tell you these young business men I watch just do my heart good! *They* don't set around on the back fence—no, sir! They take enough exercise to keep their health; and they go to a baseball game once or twice a week in summer, maybe, and they're raisin' nice families, with sons to take their places sometime and carry on the work—because the work's got to go *on!* They're puttin' their life-blood into it, I tell you, and that's why we're gettin' bigger every minute, and why *they're* gettin' bigger, and why it's all goin' to keep *on* gettin' bigger!"

He slapped the desk resoundingly with his open palm, and then, observing that Bibbs remained in the same impassive attitude, with his eyes still fixed upon the ceiling in a contemplation somewhat plaintive, Sheridan was impelled to groan. "Oh, Lord!" he said. "This is the way you always were. I don't believe you understand a darn word I been sayin'! You don't *look* as if you did. By George! it's discouraging!"

"I don't understand about getting—about getting bigger," said Bibbs, bringing his gaze down to look at his father placatively. "I don't see just why——"

"*What?*" Sheridan leaned forward, resting his hands upon the desk and staring across it incredulously at his son.

"I don't understand—exactly—what you want it all bigger for!"

"Great God!" shouted Sheridan, and struck the desk a blow with his clenched fist. "A son of mine asks me that! You go out and ask the poorest day-labourer you can find! Ask him that question——"

"I did once," Bibbs interrupted; "when I was in the machine-shop. I——"

"Wha'd he say?"

"He said, 'Oh, hell!'" answered Bibbs, mildly.

"Yes, I reckon he would!" Sheridan swung away from the desk. "I reckon he certainly would! And I got plenty sympathy with him right now, myself!"

"It's the same answer, then?" Bibbs's voice was serious, almost tremulous.

"Damnation!" Sheridan roared. "Did you ever hear the word Prosperity, you ninny? Did you ever hear the word Ambition? Did you ever hear the word *Progress?*"

He flung himself into a chair after the outburst, his big chest surging, his throat tumultuous with guttural incoherences. "Now then," he said, huskily, when the anguish had somewhat abated, "what do you want to do?"

"Sir?"

"What do you *want* to do, I said."

Taken by surprise, Bibbs stammered. "What—what do—I—what——"

"If I'd let you do exactly what you had the whim for, what would you do?"

Bibbs looked startled; then timidity overwhelmed him—a profound shyness. He bent his head and fixed his lowered eyes upon the toe of his shoe, which he moved to and fro upon the rug, like a culprit called to the desk in school.

"What would you do? Loaf?"

"No, sir." Bibbs's voice was almost inaudible, and what little sound it made was unquestionably a guilty sound. "I suppose I'd—I'd——"

"Well?"

"I suppose I'd try to—to write."

"Write what?"

"Nothing important—just poems and essays, perhaps."

"That all?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see," said his father, breathing quickly with the restraint he was putting upon himself. "That is, you want to write, but you don't want to write anything of any account."

"You think——"

Sheridan got up again. "I take my hat off to the man that can write a good ad," he said, emphatically. "The best writin' talent in this country is right spang in the ad business to-day. You buy a magazine for good writin'—look on the back of it! Let me tell you I pay money for that kind o' writin'. Maybe you think it's easy. Just try it! *I*'ve tried it, and *I* can't do it. I tell you an ad's got to be written so it makes people do the hardest thing in this world to *get* 'em to do: it's got to make 'em give up their *money !* You talk about 'poems and essays.' I tell you when it comes to the actual skill o' puttin' words together so as to make things *happen*, R. T. Bloss, right here in this city, knows more in a minute than George Waldo Emerson ever knew in his whole life!"

"You—you may be——" Bibbs said, indistinctly, the last word smothered in a cough.

"Of *course* I'm right! And if it ain't just like you to want to take up with the most out-o'-date kind o' writin' there is! 'Poems and essays!' My Lord, Bibbs, that's *women's* work! You can't pick up a newspaper without havin' to see where Mrs. Rumskididdle read a paper on 'Jane Eyre,' or 'East Lynne,' at the God-Knows-What Club. And 'poetry'! Why, look at Edith! I expect that poem o' hers would set a pretty high-water mark for you, young man, and it's the only one she's ever managed to write in her whole *life !* When I wanted her to go on and write some more she said it took too much time. Said it took months and months. And Edith's a smart girl; she's got more energy in her little finger than you ever give me a chance to see in your whole body, Bibbs. Now look

at the facts: say she could turn out four or five poems a year and you could turn out maybe two. That medal she got was worth about fifteen dollars, so there's your income—thirty dollars a year! That's a fine success to make of your life! I'm not sayin' a word against poetry. I wouldn't take ten thousand dollars right now for that poem of Edith's; and poetry's all right enough in its place—but you leave it to the girls. A man's got to do a man's work in this world."

He seated himself in a chair at his son's side and, leaning over, tapped Bibbs confidentially on the knee. "This city's got the greatest future in America, and if my sons behave right by me and by themselves they're goin' to have a mighty fair share of it—a mighty fair share. I love this town. It's God's own footstool, and it's made money for me every day right along, I don't know how many years. I love it like I do my own business, and I'd fight for it as quick as I'd fight for my own family. It's a beautiful town. Look at our wholesale district; look at any district you want to; look at the park system Dan Oliphant's puttin' through, and the boulevards and the public statuary. And she grows. God! how she grows!" He had become intensely grave; he spoke with solemnity. "Now, Bibbs, I can't take any of it—nor any gold nor silver nor buildings nor bonds—away with me in my shroud when I have to go. But I want to leave my share in it to my boys. I've worked for it; I've been a builder and a maker; and two blades of grass have grown where one grew before, whenever I laid my hand on the ground and willed 'em to grow. I've built big, and I want the buildin' to go on. And when my last hour comes I want to know that my boys are ready to take charge; that they're fit to take charge and go *on* with it. Bibbs, when that hour comes I want to know that my boys are big men, ready and fit to take hold of big things. Bibbs, when I'm up above I want to know that the big share I've made mine, here below, is growin' bigger and bigger in the charge of my boys."

He leaned back, deeply moved. "There!" he said, huskily. "I've never spoken more what was in my heart in my life.

I do it because I want you to understand—and not think me a mean father. I never had to talk that way to Jim and Roscoe. They understood without any talk, Bibbs."

"I see," said Bibbs. "At least I think I do. But——"

"Wait a minute!" Sheridan raised his hand. "If you see the least bit in the world, then you understand how it feels to me to have my son set here and talk about 'poems and essays' and such-like fooleries. And you must understand, too, what it meant to start one o' my boys and have him come back on me the way you did, and have to be sent to a sanitarium because he couldn't stand work. Now, let's get right down to it, Bibbs. I've had a whole lot o' talk with ole Doc Gurney about you, one time another, and I reckon I understand your case just about as well as he does, anyway! Now here, I'll be frank with you. I started you in harder than what I did the other boys, and that was for your own good, because I saw you needed to be shook up more'n they did. You were always kind of moody and mopish—and you needed work that'd keep you on the jump. Now, why did it make you sick instead of brace you up and make a man of you the way it ought of done? I pinned ole Gurney down to it. I says, 'Look here, ain't it really because he just plain hated it?' 'Yes,' he says, 'that's it. If he'd enjoyed it, it wouldn't 'a' hurt him. He loathes it, and that affects his nervous system. The more he tries it, the more he hates it; and the more he hates it, the more injury it does him.' That ain't quite his words, but it's what he meant. And that's about the way it is."

"Yes," said Bibbs, "that's about the way it is."

"Well, then, I reckon it's up to me not only to make you do it, but to make you like it!"

Bibbs shivered. And he turned upon his father a look that was almost ghostly. "I can't," he said, in a low voice. "I can't."

"Can't go back to the shop?"

"No. Can't like it. I can't."

Sheridan jumped up, his patience gone. To his own view, he had reasoned exhaustively, had explained fully and had

pleaded more than a father should, only to be met in the end with the unreasoning and mysterious stubbornness which had been Bibbs's baffling characteristic from childhood. "By George, you will!" he cried. "You'll go back there and you'll like it! Gurney says it won't hurt you if you like it, and he says it'll kill you if you go back and hate it; so it looks as if it was about up to you not to hate it. Well, Gurney's a fool! Hatin' work doesn't kill anybody; and this isn't goin' to kill you, whether you hate it or not. I've never made a mistake in a serious matter in my life, and it wasn't a mistake my sendin' you there in the first place. And I'm goin' to prove it —I'm goin' to send you back there and vindicate my judgment. Gurney says it's all 'mental attitude.' Well, you're goin' to learn the right one! He says in a couple more months this fool thing that's been the matter with you'll be disappeared completely and you'll be back in as good or better condition than you were before you ever went into the shop. And right then is when you begin over—right in that same shop! Nobody can call me a hard man or a mean father. I do the best I can for my chuldern, and I take the full responsibility for bringin' my sons up to be men. Now, so far, I've failed with you. But I'm not goin' to keep *on* failin'. I never tackled a job *yet* I didn't put through, and I'm not goin' to begin with my own son. I'm goin' to make a *man* of you. By God! I am!"

Bibbs rose and went slowly to the door, where he turned. "You say you give me a couple of months?" he said.

Sheridan pushed a bell-button on his desk. "Gurney said two months more would put you back where you were. You go home and begin to get yourself in the right 'mental attitude' before those two months are up! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir," said Bibbs, meekly.

CHAPTER IX

BIBBS'S room, that neat apartment for transients to which the "lamidal" George had shown him upon his return, still bore the appearance of temporary quarters, possibly because Bibbs had no clear conception of himself as a permanent incumbent. However, he had set upon the mantelpiece the two photographs that he owned: one, a "group" twenty years old—his father and mother, with Jim and Roscoe as boys—and the other a "cabinet" of Edith at sixteen. And upon a table were the books he had taken from his trunk: "Sartor Resartus," "Virginibus Puerisque," "Huckleberry Finn," and "Afterwhiles." There were some other books in the trunk—a large one, which remained unremoved at the foot of the bed, adding to the general impression of transiency. It contained nearly all the possessions as well as the secret life of Bibbs Sheridan, and Bibbs sat beside it, the day after his interview with his father, raking over a small collection of manuscripts in the top tray. Some of these he glanced through dubiously, finding little comfort in them; but one made him smile. Then he shook his head ruefully indeed, and ruefully began to read it. It was written on paper stamped "Hood Sanitarium," and it bore the title, "Leisure."

A man may keep a quiet heart at seventy miles an hour, but not if he is running the train. Nor is the habit of contemplation a useful quality in the stoker of a foundry furnace; it will not be found to recommend him to the approbation of his superiors. For a profession adapted solely to the pursuit of happiness in thinking, I would choose that of an invalid: his money is time and he may spend it on Olympus. It will not suffice to be an amateur invalid. To my way of thinking, the perfect practitioner must be to all outward purposes already dead if he is to begin the perfect enjoyment of life. His serenity must not be disturbed by rumours of recovery; he must lie serene in his long chair in the sunshine. The world must be on the

other side of the wall, and the wall must be so thick and so high that he cannot hear the roaring of the furnace fires and the screaming of the whistles. Peace——

Having read so far as the word "peace," Bibbs suffered an interruption interesting as a coincidence of contrast. High voices sounded in the hall just outside his door; and it became evident that a woman's quarrel was in progress, the parties to it having begun it in Edith's room, and continuing it vehemently as they came out into the hall.

"Yes, you *better* go home!" Bibbs heard his sister vociferating, shrilly. "You better go home and keep your mind a little more on your *husband!*"

"Edie, Edie!" he heard his mother remonstrating, as peacemaker.

"You see here!" This was Sibyl, and her voice was both acrid and tremulous. "Don't you talk to me that way! I came here to tell Mother Sheridan what I'd heard, and to let her tell Father Sheridan if she thought she ought to, and I did it for your own good."

"Yes, you did!" And Edith's gibing laughter tooted loudly. "Yes, you did! *You* didn't have any other reason! *Oh* no! *You* don't want to break it up between Bobby Lamhorn and me because——"

"Edie, Edie! Now, now!"

"Oh, hush up, mamma! I'd like to know, then, if she says her new friends tell her he's got such a reputation that he oughtn't to come here, what about his not going to *her* house. How——"

"I've explained that to Mother Sheridan." Sibyl's voice indicated that she was descending the stairs. "Married people are not the same. Some things that should be shielded from a young girl——"

This seemed to have no very soothing effect upon Edith. "'Shielded from a young girl'!" she shrilled. "You seem pretty willing to be the shield! You look out Roscoe doesn't notice what kind of a shield you are!"

Sibyl's answer was inaudible, but Mrs. Sheridan's flurried attempts at pacification were renewed. "Now, Edie, Edie, she means it for your good, and you'd oughtn't to——"

"Oh, hush up, mamma, and let me alone! If you dare tell papa——"

"Now, now! I'm not going to tell him to-day, and maybe——"

"You've got to promise *never* to tell him!" the girl cried, passionately.

"Well, we'll see. You just come back in your own room, and we'll——"

"No! I *won't* 'talk it over'! Stop pulling me! Let me *alone!*" And Edith, flinging herself violently upon Bibbs's door, jerked it open, swung round it into the room, slammed the door behind her, and threw herself, face down, upon the bed in such a riot of emotion that she had no perception of Bibbs's presence in the room. Gasping and sobbing in a passion of tears, she beat the coverlet and pillows with her clenched fists. "Sneak!" she babbled aloud. "Sneak! Snake-in-the-grass! Cat!"

Bibbs saw that she did not know he was there, and he went softly toward the door, hoping to get away before she became aware of him; but some sound of his movement reached her, and she sat up, startled, facing him.

"Bibbs! I thought I saw you go out awhile ago."

"Yes. I came back, though. I'm sorry——"

"Did you hear me quarrelling with Sibyl?"

"Only what you said in the hall. You lie down again, Edith. I'm going out."

"No; don't go." She applied a handkerchief to her eyes, emitted a sob, and repeated her request. "Don't go. I don't mind you; you're quiet, anyhow. Mamma's so fussy, and never gets anywhere. I don't mind you at all, but I wish you'd sit down."

"All right." And he returned to his chair beside the trunk. "Go ahead and cry all you want, Edith," he said. "No harm in that!"

"Sibyl told mamma—*oh!*" she began, choking. "Mary Vertrees had mamma and Sibyl and I to tea, one afternoon two weeks or so ago, and she had some women there that Sibyl's been crazy to get in with, and she just laid herself out to make a hit with 'em, and she's been running after 'em ever since, and now she comes over here and says *they* say Bobby Lamhorn is so bad that, even though they like his family, none of the nice people in town would let him in their houses. In the first place, it's a falsehood, and I don't believe a word of it; and in the second place I know the reason she did it, and, what's more, she *knows* I know it! I won't *say* what it is—not yet—because papa and all of you would think I'm as crazy as she is snaky; and Roscoe's such a fool he'd probably quit speaking to me. But it's true! Just you watch her; that's all I ask. Just you watch that woman. You'll see!"

As it happened, Bibbs was literally watching "that woman." Glancing from the window, he saw Sibyl pause upon the pavement in front of the old house next door. She stood a moment, in deep thought, then walked quickly up the path to the door, undoubtedly with the intention of calling. But he did not mention this to his sister, who, after delivering herself of a rather vague jeremiad upon the subject of her sister-in-law's treacheries, departed to her own chamber, leaving him to his speculations. The chief of these concerned the social elasticities of women. Sibyl had just been a participant in a violent scene; she had suffered hot insult of a kind that could not fail to set her quivering with resentment; and yet she elected to betake herself to the presence of people whom she knew no more than "formally." Bibbs marvelled. Surely, he reflected, some traces of emotion must linger upon Sibyl's face or in her manner; she could not have ironed it all quite out in the three or four minutes it took her to reach the Vertreeses' door.

And in this he was not mistaken, for Mary Vertrees was at that moment wondering what internal excitement Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan was striving to master. But Sibyl had no

idea that she was allowing herself to exhibit anything except the gaiety which she conceived proper to the manner of a casual caller. She was wholly intent upon fulfilling the sudden purpose that brought her, and she was no more self-conscious than she was finely intelligent. For Sibyl Sheridan belonged to a type Scriptural in its antiquity. She was merely the idle and half-educated intriguer who may and does delude men, of course, and the best and dullest of her own sex as well, finding invariably strong supporters among these latter. It is a type that has wrought some damage in the world and would have wrought greater, save for the check put upon its power by intelligent women and by its own "lack of perspective," for it is a type that never sees itself. Sibyl followed her impulses with no reflection or question—it was like a hound on the gallop after a master on horseback. She had not even the instinct to stop and consider her effect. If she wished to make a certain impression she believed that she made it. She believed that she was believed.

"My mother asked me to say that she was sorry she couldn't come down," Mary said, when they were seated.

Sibyl ran the scale of a cooing simulance of laughter, which she had been brought up to consider the polite thing to do after a remark addressed to her by any person with whom she was not on familiar terms. It was intended partly as a courtesy and partly as the foundation for an impression of sweetness.

"Just thought I'd fly in a minute," she said, continuing the cooing to relieve the last doubt of her geniality. "I thought I'd just behave like *real* country neighbours. We are almost out in the country, so far from downtown, aren't we? And it seemed such a *lovely* day! I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed meeting those nice people at tea that afternoon. You see, coming here a bride and never having lived here before, I've had to depend on my husband's friends almost entirely, and I really 've known scarcely anybody. Mr. Sheridan has been so engrossed in business ever since he was a mere boy, why, of course——"

She paused, with the air of having completed an explanation.

"Of course," said Mary, sympathetically accepting it.

"Yes. I've been seeing quite a lot of the Kittersbys since that afternoon," Sibyl went on. "They're really delightful people. Indeed they are! Yes——"

She stopped with unconscious abruptness, her mind plainly wandering to another matter; and Mary perceived that she had come upon a definite errand. Moreover, a tensing of Sibyl's eyelids, in that moment of abstraction as she looked aside from her hostess, indicated that the errand was a serious one for the caller and easily to be connected with the slight but perceptible agitation underlying her assumption of cheerful ease. There was a restlessness of breathing, a restlessness of hands.

"Mrs. Kittersby and her daughter were chatting about some of the people here in town the other day," said Sibyl, repeating the cooing and protracting it. "They said something that took *me* by surprise! We were talking about our mutual friend, Mr. Robert Lamhorn——"

Mary interrupted her promptly. "Do you mean 'mutual' to include my mother and me?" she asked.

"Why, yes; the Kittersbys and you and all of us Sheridans, I mean."

"No," said Mary. "We shouldn't consider Mr. Robert Lamhorn a friend of ours."

To her surprise, Sibyl nodded eagerly, as if greatly pleased. "That's just the way Mrs. Kittersby talked!" she cried, with a vehemence that made Mary stare. "Yes, and I hear that's the way *all* you old families here speak of him!"

Mary looked aside, but otherwise she was able to maintain her composure. "I had the impression he was a friend of yours," she said; adding, hastily, "and your husband's."

"Oh, yes" said the caller, absently. "He is, certainly. A man's reputation for a little gaiety oughtn't to make a great difference to married people, of course. It's where young girls are in question. *Then* it may be very, very dangerous. There

are a great many things safe and proper for married people that might be awf'ly imprudent for a young girl. Don't you agree, Miss Vertrees?"

"I don't know," returned the frank Mary. "Do you mean that you intend to remain a friend of Mr. Lamhorn's, but disapprove of Miss Sheridan's doing so?"

"That's it exactly!" was the naive and ardent response of Sibyl. "What *I* feel about it is that a man with his reputation isn't at all suitable for Edith, and the family ought to be made to understand it. I tell you," she cried, with a sudden access of vehemence, "her father ought to put his foot down!"

Her eyes flashed with a green spark; something seemed to leap out and then retreat, but not before Mary had caught a glimpse of it, as one might catch a glimpse of a thing darting forth and then scuttling back into hiding under a bush.

"Of course," said Sibyl, much more composedly, "I hardly need say that it's entirely on Edith's account that I'm worried about this. I'm as fond of Edith as if she was really my sister, and I can't help fretting about it. It would break my heart to have Edith's life spoiled."

This tune was off the key, to Mary's ear. Sibyl tried to sing with pathos, but she flatted.

And when a lady receives a call from another who suffers under the stress of some feeling which she wishes to conceal, there is not uncommonly developed a phenomenon of duality comparable to the effect obtained by placing two mirrors opposite each other, one clear and the other flawed. In this case, particularly, Sibyl had an imperfect consciousness of Mary. The Mary Vertrees that she saw was merely something to be cozened to her own frantic purpose—a Mary Vertrees who was incapable of penetrating that purpose. Sibyl sat there believing that she was projecting the image of herself that she desired to project, never dreaming that with every word, every look, and every gesture she was more and more fully disclosing the pitiable truth to the clear eyes of Mary. And the Sibyl that Mary saw was an overdressed woman, in manner half rustic, and in mind as shallow as a pan, but pos-

sessed by emotions that appeared to be strong—perhaps even violent. What those emotions were Mary had not guessed, but she began to suspect.

"And Edith's life *would* be spoiled," Sibyl continued. "It would be a dreadful thing for the whole family. She's the very apple of Father Sheridan's eye, and he's as proud of her as he is of Jim and Roscoe. It would be a horrible thing for him to have her marry a man like Robert Lamhorn; but he doesn't *know* anything about him, and if somebody doesn't tell him, what I'm most afraid of is that Edith might get his consent and hurry on the wedding before he finds out, and then it would be too late. You see, Miss Vertrees, it's very difficult for me to decide just what it's my duty to do."

"I see," said Mary, looking at her thoughtfully. "Does Miss Sheridan seem to—to care very much about him?"

"He's deliberately fascinated her," returned the visitor, beginning to breathe quickly and heavily. "Oh, she wasn't difficult! She knew she wasn't in right in this town, and she was crazy to meet the people that were, and she thought he was one of 'em. But that was only the start that made it easy for him—and he didn't need it. He could have done it, anyway!" Sibyl was launched now; her eyes were furious and her voice shook. "He went after her deliberately, the way he does everything; he's as cold-blooded as a fish. All he cares about is his own pleasure, and lately he's decided it would be pleasant to get hold of a piece of real money—and there was Edith! And he'll marry her! Nothing on earth can stop him unless he finds out she won't *have* any money if she marries him, and the only person that could make him understand that is Father Sheridan. Somehow, that's got to be managed, because Lamhorn is going to hurry it on as fast as he can. He told me so last night. He said he was going to marry her the first minute he could persuade her to it—and little Edith's all ready to be persuaded!" Sibyl's eyes flashed green again. "And he swore he'd do it," she panted. "He swore he'd marry Edith Sheridan, and nothing on earth could stop him!"

And then Mary understood. Her lips parted and she stared

at the babbling creature incredulously, a sudden vivid picture in her mind, a canvas of unconscious Sibyl's painting. Mary beheld it with pity and horror: she saw Sibyl clinging to Robert Lamhorn, raging, in a whisper, perhaps—for Roscoe might have been in the house, or servants might have heard. She saw Sibyl entreating, beseeching, threatening despairingly, and Lamhorn—tired of her—first evasive, then brutally letting her have the truth; and at last, infuriated, "swearing" to marry her rival. If Sibyl had not babbled out the word "swore" it might have been less plain.

The poor woman blundered on, wholly unaware of what she had confessed. "You see," she said, more quietly, "whatever's going to be done ought to be done right away. I went over and told Mother Sheridan what I'd heard about Lamhorn—oh, I was open and aboveboard! I told her right before Edith. I think it ought all to be done with perfect frankness, because nobody can say it isn't for the girl's own good and what her best friend would do. But Mother Sheridan's under Edith's thumb, and she's afraid to ever come right out with anything. Father Sheridan's different. Edith can get anything she wants out of him in the way of money or ordinary indulgence, but when it comes to a matter like this he'd be a steel rock. If it's a question of his will against anybody else's he'd make his will rule if it killed 'em both! Now, he'd never in the world let Lamhorn come near the house again if he knew his reputation. So, you see, somebody's got to tell him. It isn't a very easy position for me, is it, Miss Vertrees?"

"No," said Mary, gravely.

"Well, to be frank," said Sibyl, smiling, "that's why I've come to you."

"To *me!*" Mary frowned.

Sibyl rippled and cooed again. "There isn't *anybody* ever made such a hit with Father Sheridan in his life as you have. And of course we *all* hope you're not going to be exactly an outsider in the affairs of the family!" (This sally with another and louder effect of laughter.) "And if it's *my* duty, why, in a way, I think it might be thought yours, too."

"No, no!" exclaimed Mary, sharply.

"Listen," said Sibyl. "Now suppose I go to Father Sheridan with this story, and Edith says it's not true; suppose she says Lamhorn has a good reputation and that I'm repeating irresponsible gossip, or suppose (what's most likely) she loses her temper and says I invented it, then what am I going to do? Father Sheridan doesn't know Mrs. Kittersby and her daughter, and they're out of the question, anyway. But suppose I could say: 'All right, if you want proof, ask Miss Vertrees. She came with me, and she's waiting in the next room right now, to——'"

"No, no," said Mary, quickly. "You mustn't——"

"Listen just a minute more," Sibyl urged, confidingly. She was on easy ground now, to her own mind, and had no doubt of her success. "You naturally don't want to begin by taking part in a family quarrel, but if *you* take part in it, it won't be one. You don't know yourself what weight you carry over there, and no one would have the right to say you did it except out of the purest kindness. Don't you see that Jim and his father would admire you all the more for it? Miss Vertrees, listen! Don't you see we *ought* to do it, you and I? Do you suppose Robert Lamhorn cares the snap of his finger for her? Do you suppose a man like him would *look* at Edith Sheridan if it wasn't for the money?" And again Sybil's emotion rose to the surface. "I tell you he's after nothing on earth but to get his finger in that old man's money-pile. Over there, next door! He'd marry *anybody* to do it. Marry Edith?" she cried. "I tell you he'd marry their nigger cook for *that!*"

She stopped, afraid—at the wrong time—that she had been too vehement, but a glance at Mary reassured her, and Sibyl decided that she had produced the effect she wished. Mary was not looking at her; she was staring straight before her at the wall, her eyes wide and shining. She became visibly a little paler as Sibyl looked at her.

"After nothing on earth but to get his finger in that old man's money-pile, over there, next door!" The voice was vulgar, the words were vulgar—and the plain truth was vulgar!

How it rang in Mary Vertrees's ears! The clear mirror had caught its own image clearly in the flawed one at last.

Sibyl put forth her best bid to clench the matter. She offered her bargain. "Now don't you worry," she said, sunnily, "about this setting Edith against you. She'll get over it after a while, anyway, but if she tried to be spiteful and make it uncomfortable for you when you drop in over there, or managed so as to sort of leave you out, why, *I've* got a house, and Jim likes to come there. I don't *think* Edith *would* be that way; she's too crazy to have you take her around with the smart crowd, but if she *did*, you needn't worry. And another thing—I guess you won't mind Jim's own sister-in-law speaking of it. Of course, I don't know just how matters stand between you and Jim, but Jim and Roscoe are about as much alike as two brothers can be, and Roscoe was very slow making up his mind; sometimes I used to think he actually never *would*. Now, what I mean is, sisters-in-law can do lots of things to help matters on like that. There's lots of little things can be said, and lots——"

She stopped, puzzled. Mary Vertrees had gone from pale to scarlet, and now, still scarlet indeed, she rose, without a word of explanation, or any other kind of word, and walked slowly to the open door and out of the room.

Sibyl was a little taken aback. She supposed Mary had remembered something neglected and necessary for the instruction of a servant, and that she would return in a moment; but it was rather a rude excess of absent-mindedness not to have excused herself, especially as her guest was talking. And, Mary's return being delayed, Sibyl found time to think this unprefaced exit odder and ruder than she had first considered it. There might have been more excuse for it, she thought, had she been speaking of matters less important—offering to do the girl all the kindness in her power, too!

Sibyl yawned and swung her muff impatiently; she examined the sole of her shoe; she decided on a new shape of heel; she made an inventory of the furniture of the room, of the rugs, of the wall-paper and engravings. Then she looked at

her watch and frowned; went to a window and stood looking out upon the brown lawn, then came back to the chair she had abandoned, and sat again. There was no sound in the house.

A strange expression began imperceptibly to alter the planes of her face, and slowly she grew as scarlet as Mary—scarlet to the ears. She looked at her watch again—and twenty-five minutes had elapsed since she had looked at it before.

She went into the hall, glanced over her shoulder oddly; then she let herself softly out of the front door, and went across the street to her own house.

Roscoe met her upon the threshold, gloomily. "Saw you from the window," he explained. "You must find a lot to say to that old lady."

"What old lady?"

"Mrs. Vertrees. I been waiting for you a long time, and I saw the daughter come out, fifteen minutes ago, and post a letter, and then walk on up the street. Don't stand out on the porch," he said, crossly. "Come in here. There's something it's come time I'll have to talk to you about. Come in!"

But as she was moving to obey he glanced across at his father's house and started. He lifted his hand to shield his eyes from the setting sun, staring fixedly. "Something's the matter over there," he muttered, and then, more loudly, as alarm came into his voice, he said, "What's the matter over there?"

Bibbs dashed out of the gate in an automobile set at its highest speed, and as he saw Roscoe he made a gesture singularly eloquent of calamity, and was lost at once in a cloud of dust down the street. Edith had followed part of the way down the drive, and it could be seen that she was crying bitterly. She lifted both arms to Roscoe, summoning him.

"By George!" gasped Roscoe. "I believe somebody's dead!"

And he started for the New House at a run.

CHAPTER X

SHERIDAN had decided to conclude his day's work early that afternoon, and at about two o'clock he left his office with a man of affairs from foreign parts, who had travelled far for a business conference with Sheridan and his colleagues. Herr Favre, in spite of his French name, was a gentleman of Bavaria. It was his first visit to our country, and Sheridan took pleasure in showing him the sights of the country's finest city. They got into an open car at the main entrance of the Sheridan Building. and were driven first, slowly and momentously, through the wholesale district and the retail district; then more rapidly they inspected the packing-houses and the stock-yards; then skirmished over the "park system" and "boulevards"; and after that whizzed through the "residence section" on their way to the factories and foundries.

"All cray," observed Herr Favre, smilingly.

"'Cray'?" echoed Sheridan. "I don't know what you mean. 'Cray'?"

"No white," said Herr Favre, with a wave of his hand toward the long rows of houses on both sides of the street. "No white lace window-curtains; all cray lace window-curtains."

"Oh, I see!" Sheridan laughed indulgently. "You mean '*gray*.' No, they ain't, they're white. I never saw any gray ones."

Herr Favre shook his head, much amused. "There are *no* white ones," he said. "There is no white *anything* in your city; no white window-curtains, no white house, no white peeble!" He pointed upward. "Smoke!" Then he sniffed the air and clasped his nose between forefinger and thumb. "Smoke! Smoke ef'rywhere. Smoke in your insites." He tapped his chest. "Smoke in your lunks!"

"Oh! *Smoke!*" Sheridan cried with gusto, drawing in a deep breath and patently finding it delicious. "You *bet* we got smoke!"

"Exbensif!" said Herr Favre. "Ruins foliage; ruins fabrics. Maybe in summer it iss not so bad, but I wonder your wifes will bear it."

Sheridan laughed uproariously. "They know it means new spring hats for 'em!"

"They must need many, too!" said the visitor. "New hats, new all things, but nothing white. In München we could not do it; we are a safing peeble."

"Where's that?"

"In München. You say 'Munich.'"

"Well, I never been to Munich, but I took in the Mediterranean trip, and I tell you, outside o' some right good scenery, all *I* saw was mighty dirty and mighty shiftless and mighty run-down at the heel. Now comin' right down *to* it, Mr. Farver, wouldn't you rather live here in this town than in Munich? I know you got more enterprise up there than the part of the old country I saw, and I know *you're* a live business man and you're associated with others like you, but when it comes to *livin'* in a place, wouldn't you heap rather be here than over there?"

"For me," said Herr Favre, "no. Here I should not think I was living. It would be like the miner who goes into the mine to work; nothing else."

"We got a good many good citiezns here from your part o' the world. *They* like it."

"Oh yes." And Herr Favre laughed deprecatingly. "The first generation, they bring their Germany with them; then, after that, they are Americans, like you." He tapped his host's big knee genially. "You are patriot; so are they."

"Well, I reckon you must be a pretty hot little patriot yourself, Mr. Farver!" Sheridan exclaimed, gaily. "You certainly stand up for your own town, if you stick to sayin' you'd rather live there than you would here. Yes, *sir!* You sure are some patriot to say *that*—after you've seen our city! It ain't

reasonable in you, but I must say I kind of admire you for it; every man ought to stick up for his own, even when he sees the other fellow's got the goods on him. Yet I expect way down deep in your heart, Mr. Farver, you'd rather live right here than any place else in the world, if you had your choice. Man alive! this is God's country, Mr. Farver, and a blind man couldn't help seein' it! You couldn't stand where you do in a business way and *not* see it. Soho, boy! Here we are. This is the big works, and I'll show you something now that'll make your eyes stick out!"

They had arrived at the Pump Works; and for an hour Herr Favre was personally conducted and personally instructed by the founder and president, the buzzing queen bee of those buzzing hives.

"Now I'll take you for a spin in the country," said Sheridan, when at last they came out to the car again. "We'll take a breezer." But, with his foot on the step, he paused to hail a neat young man who came out of the office smiling a greeting. "Hello, young fellow!" Sheridan said, heartily. "On the job, are you, Jimmie? Ha! They don't catch you *off* of it very often, I guess, though I do hear you go automobile-ridin' in the country sometimes with a mighty fine-lookin' girl settin' up beside you!" He roared with laughter, clapping his son upon the shoulder. "That's all right with me—if it is with *her!* So, Jimmie? Well, when we goin' to move into your new warehouses? Monday?"

"Sunday, if you want to," said Jim.

"No!" cried his father, delighted. "Don't tell me you're goin' to keep your word about dates! That's no way to do contractin'! Never heard of a contractor yet didn't want more time."

"They'll be all ready for you on the minute," said Jim. "I'm going over both of 'em now, with Links and Sherman, from foundation to roof. I guess they'll pass inspection, too!"

"Well, then, when you get through with that," said his father, "you go and take your girl out ridin'. By George! you've earned it! You tell her you stand high with *me!*" He

stepped into the car, waving a waggish farewell, and, when the wheels were in motion again, he turned upon his companion a broad face literally shining with pride. "That's my boy Jimmie!" he said.

"Fine young man, yes," said Herr Favre.

"I got two o' the finest boys," said Sheridan, "I got two o' the finest boys God ever made, and that's a fact, Mr. Farver! Jim's the oldest, and I tell you they got to get up the day before if they expect to catch *him* in bed! My other boy, Roscoe, he's always to the good, too, but Jim's a wizard. You saw them two new-process warehouses, just about finished? Well, *Jim* built 'em. I'll tell you about that, Mr. Farver." And he recited this history, describing the new process at length; in fact, he had such pride in Jim's achievement that he told Herr Favre all about it more than once.

"Fine young man, yes," repeated the good Münchner, three-quarters of an hour later. They were many miles out in the open country by this time.

"He is that!" said Sheridan, adding, as if confidentially: "I got a fine family, Mr. Farver—fine chuldern. I got a daughter now; you take her and put her anywhere you please, and she'll shine up with *any* of 'em. There's culture and refinement and society in this town by the car-load, and here lately she's been gettin' right in the thick of it—her and my daughter-in-law, both. I got a mighty fine daughter-in-law, Mr. Farver. I'm goin' to get you up for a meal with us before you leave town, and you'll see—and, well, sir, from all I hear the two of 'em been holdin' their own with the best. Myself, I and the wife never had time for much o' that kind o' doin's, but it's all right and good for the chuldern; and my daughter she's always kind of taken to it. I'll read you a poem she wrote when I get you up at the house. She wrote it in school and took the first prize for poetry with it. I tell you they don't make 'em any smarter 'n that girl, Mr. Farver. Yes, sir; take us all round, we're a pretty happy family; yes, sir. Roscoe hasn't got any chuldern yet, and I haven't ever spoke to him and his wife about it—it's kind of a delicate matter—but it's

about time the wife and I saw some gran'chuldern growin' up around us. I certainly do hanker for about four or five little curly-headed rascals to take on my knee. Boys, I hope, o' course; that's only natural. Jim's got his eye on a mighty splendid-lookin' girl; lives right next door to us. I expect you heard me joshin' him about it back yonder. She's one the ole blue-bloods here, and I guess it was a mighty good stock—to raise *her!* She's one these girls that stand right up and look at you! And pretty? She's the prettiest thing you ever saw! Good size, too; good health and good sense. Jim'll be just right if he gets her. I must say it tickles *me* to think o' the way that boy took ahold o' that job back yonder. Four months and a half! Yes, sir——"

He expanded this theme once more; and thus he continued to entertain the stranger throughout the long drive. Darkness had fallen before they reached the city on their return, and it was after five when Sheridan allowed Herr Favre to descend at the door of his hotel, where boys were shrieking extra editions of the evening paper.

"Now, good-night, Mr. Farver," said Sheridan, leaning from the car to shake hands with his guest. "Don't forget I'm goin' to come around and take you up to—— Go on away, boy!"

A newsboy had thrust himself almost between them, yelling "Extry! Secon' Extry. Extry, all about the horrable acci*dent.* Extry!"

"Get out!" laughed Sheridan. "Who wants to read about accidents? Get out!"

The boy moved away philosophically. "Extry! Extry!" he shrilled. "Three men killed! Extry! Millionaire killed! Two other men killed! Extry! Extry!"

"Don't forget, Mr. Farver." Sheridan completed his interrupted farewells. "I'll come by to take you up to our house for dinner. I'll be here for you about half-past five to-morrow afternoon. Hope you 'njoyed the drive much as I have. Good-night—good-night!" He leaned back, speaking to the chauf-

feur. "Now you can take me around to the Central City barber-shop, boy. I want to get a shave 'fore I go up home."

"Extry! Extry!" screamed the newsboys, zigzagging among the crowds like bats in the dusk. "Extry! all about the horrable acci*dent!* Extry!" It struck Sheridan that the papers sent out too many "Extras"; they printed "Extras" for all sorts of petty crimes and casualties. It was a mistake, he decided, critically. Crying "Wolf!" too often wouldn't sell the goods; it was bad business. The papers would "make more in the long run," he was sure, if they published an "Extra" only when something of real importance happened.

"Extry! All about the hor'ble *ax*'nt! Extry!" a boy squawked under his nose, as he descended from the car.

"Go on away!" said Sheridan, gruffly, though he smiled. He liked to see the youngsters working so noisily to get on in the world.

But as he crossed the pavement to the brilliant glass doors of the barber-shop, a second newsboy grasped the arm of the one who had thus cried his wares.

"Say, Yallern," said this second, hoarse with awe, "'n't chew know who that *is?*"

"Who?"

"It's *Sheridan!*"

"Jeest!" cried the first, staring insanely.

At about the same hour, four times a week—Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—Sheridan stopped at this shop to be shaved by the head barber. The barbers were negroes, he was their great man, and it was their habit to give him a "reception," his entrance being always the signal for a flurry of jocular hospitality, followed by general excesses of briskness and gaiety. But it was not so this evening.

The shop was crowded. Copies of the "Extra" were being read by men waiting, and by men in the latter stages of treatment. "Extras" lay upon vacant seats and showed from the pockets of hanging coats.

There was a loud chatter between the practitioners and

their recumbent patients, a vocal charivari which stopped abruptly as Sheridan opened the door. His name seemed to fizz in the air like the last sputtering of a firework; the barbers stopped shaving and clipping; lathered men turned their prostrate heads to stare, and there was a moment of amazing silence in the shop.

The head barber, nearest the door, stood like a barber in a tableau. His left hand held stretched between thumb and forefinger an elastic section of his helpless customer's cheek, while his right hand hung poised above it, the razor motionless. And then, roused from trance by the door's closing, he accepted the fact of Sheridan's presence. The barber remembered that there are no circumstances in life—or just after it —under which a man does not need to be shaved.

He stepped forward, profoundly grave. "I be through with this man in the chair one minute, Mist' Sheridan," he said, in a hushed voice. "Yessuh." And of a solemn negro youth who stood by, gazing stupidly. "You goin' *resign ?*" he demanded in a fierce undertone. "You goin' take Mist' Sheridan's coat?' He sent an angry look round the shop, and the barbers, taking his meaning, averted their eyes and fell to work, the murmur of subdued conversation buzzing from chair to chair.

"You sit down *one* minute, Mist' Sheridan," said the head barber, gently. "I fix nice chair fo' you to wait in."

"Never mind," said Sheridan. "Go on get through with your man."

"Yessuh." And he went quickly back to his chair on tiptoe, followed by Sheridan's puzzled gaze.

Something had gone wrong in the shop, evidently. Sheridan did not know what to make of it. Ordinarily he would have shouted a hilarious demand for the meaning of the mystery, but an inexplicable silence had been imposed upon him by the hush that fell upon his entrance and by the odd look every man in the shop had bent upon him.

Vaguely disquieted, he walked to one of the seats in the rear of the shop, and looked up and down the two lines of barbers, catching quickly shifted, furtive glances here and

there. He made this brief survey after wondering if one of the barbers had died suddenly, that day, or the night before; but there was no vacancy in either line.

The seat next to his was unoccupied, but someone had left a copy of the "Extra" there, and, frowning, he picked it up and glanced at it. The first of the swollen display lines had little meaning to him:

Fatally Faulty. New Process Roof Collapses Hurling Capitalist to Death With Inventor. Seven Escape When Crash Comes. Death Claims——

Thus far had he read when a thin hand fell upon the paper, covering the print from his eyes; and, looking up, he saw Bibbs standing before him, pale and gentle, immeasurably compassionate.

"I've come for you, father," said Bibbs. "Here's the boy with your coat and hat. Put them on and come home."

And even then Sheridan did not understand. So secure was he in the strength and bigness of everything that was his, he did not know what calamity had befallen him. But he was frightened.

Without a word, he followed Bibbs heavily out through the still shop, but as they reached the pavement he stopped short, and grasping his son's sleeve with shaking fingers, swung him round so that they stood face to face.

"What—what——" His mouth could not do him the service he asked of it, he was so frightened.

"Extry!" screamed a newsboy straight in his face. "Young North Side millionaire insuntly killed! Extry!"

"Not—*Jim!*" said Sheridan.

Bibbs caught his father's hand in his own.

"And *you* come to tell me that?"

Sheridan did not know what he said. But in those first words and in the first anguish of the big, stricken face Bibbs understood the unuttered cry of accusation:

"Why wasn't it you?"

CHAPTER XI

STANDING in the black group under gaunt trees at the cemetery, three days later, Bibbs unwillingly let an old, old thought become definite in his mind: the sickly brother had buried the strong brother, and Bibbs wondered how many million times that had happened since men first made a word to name the sons of one mother. Almost literally he had buried his strong brother, for Sheridan had gone to pieces when he saw his dead son. He had nothing to help him meet the shock, neither definite religion nor "philosophy" definite or indefinite. He could only beat his forehead and beg, over and over, to be killed with an ax, while his wife was helpless except to entreat him not to "take on," herself adding a continuous lamentation. Edith, weeping, made truce with Sibyl and saw to it that the mourning garments were beyond criticism. Roscoe was dazed, and he shirked, justifying himself curiously by saying he "never had any experience in such matters." So it was Bibbs, the shy outsider, who became, during that dreadful little time, the master of the house; for as strange a thing as that, sometimes, may be the result of a death. He met the relatives from out of town at the station; he set the time for the funeral and the time for meals; he selected the flowers and he selected Jim's coffin; he did all the grim things and all the other things. Jim had belonged to an order of Knights, who lengthened the rites with a picturesque ceremony of their own, and at first Bibbs wished to avoid this, but upon reflection he offered no objection—he divined that the Knights and their service would be not precisely a consolation, but a satisfaction to his father. So the Knights led the procession, with their band playing a dirge part of the long way to the cemetery; and then turned back after forming in two lines, plumed hats sympathetically in hand, to let the hearse and the carriages pass between.

"Mighty fine-lookin' men," said Sheridan, brokenly. "They all—all liked him. He was——" His breath caught in a sob and choked him. "He was—a Grand Supreme Herald."

Bibbs had divined aright.

"Dust to dust," said the minister, under the gaunt trees; and at that Sheridan shook convulsively from head to foot. All of the black group shivered, except Bibbs, when it came to "Dust to dust." Bibbs stood passive, for he was the only one of them who had known that thought as a familiar neighbour; he had been close upon dust himself for a long, long time, and even now he could prophesy no protracted separation between himself and dust. The machine-shop had brought him very close, and if he had to go back it would probably bring him closer still; so close—as Dr. Gurney predicted—that no one would be able to tell the difference between dust and himself. And Sheridan, if Bibbs read him truly, would be all the more determined to "make a man" of him, now that there was a man less in the family. To Bibbs's knowledge, no one and nothing had ever prevented his father from carrying through his plans, once he had determined upon them; and Sheridan was incapable of believing that any plan of his would not work out according to his calculations. His nature unfitted him to accept failure. He had the gift of terrible persistence, and with unflecked confidence that his way was the only way he would hold to that way of "making a man" of Bibbs, who understood very well, in his passive and impersonal fashion, that it was a way which might make, not a man, but dust of him. But he had no shudder for the thought.

He had no shudder for that thought or for any other thought. The truth about Bibbs was in the poem which Edith had adopted: he had so thoroughly formed the over-sensitive habit of hiding his feelings that no doubt he had forgotten—by this time—where he had put some of them, especially those which concerned himself. But he had not hidden his feelings about his father where they could not be found. He was strange to his father, but his father was not strange to

him. He knew that Sheridan's plans were conceived in the stubborn belief that they would bring about a good thing for Bibbs himself; and whatever the result was to be, the son had no bitterness. Far otherwise, for as he looked at the big, woeful figure, shaking and tortured, an almost unbearable pity laid hands upon Bibbs's throat. Roscoe stood blinking, his lip quivering; Edith wept audibly; Mrs. Sheridan leaned in half collapse against her husband; but Bibbs knew that his father was the one who cared.

It was over. Men in overalls stepped forward with their shovels, and Bibbs nodded quickly to Roscoe, making a slight gesture toward the line of waiting carriages. Roscoe understood—Bibbs would stay and see the grave filled; the rest were to go. The groups began to move away over the turf; wheels creaked on the gravelled drive; and one by one the carriages filled and departed, the horses setting off at a walk. Bibbs gazed steadfastly at the workmen; he knew that his father kept looking back as he went toward the carriage, and that was a thing he did not want to see. But after a little while there were no sounds of wheels or hoofs on the gravel, and Bibbs, glancing up, saw that everyone had gone. A coupé had been left for him, the driver dozing patiently.

The workmen placed the flowers and wreaths upon the mound and about it, and Bibbs altered the position of one or two of these, then stood looking thoughtfully at the grotesque brilliancy of that festal-seeming hillock beneath the darkening November sky. "It's too bad!" he half whispered, his lips forming the words—and his meaning was that it was too bad that the strong brother had been the one to go. For this was his last thought before he walked to the coupé and saw Mary Vertrees standing, all alone, on the other side of the drive.

She had just emerged from a grove of leafless trees that grew on a slope where the tombs were many; and behind her rose a multitude of the barbaric and classic shapes we so strangely strew about our graveyards: urn-crowned columns and stone-draped obelisks, shop-carved angels and shop-carved children, poising on pillars and shafts, all lifting—

in unthought pathos—their blind stoniness toward the sky. Against such a background Bibbs was not incongruous, with his figure, in black, so long and slender, and his face so long and thin and white; nor was the undertaker's coupé out of keeping, with the shabby driver dozing on the box and the shaggy horses standing patiently in attitudes without hope and without regret. But for Mary Vertrees, here was a grotesque setting—she was a vivid, living creature of a beautiful world. And a graveyard is not the place for people to look charming.

She also looked startled and confused, but not more startled and confused than Bibbs. In "Edith's" poem he had declared his intention of hiding his heart "among the stars"; and in his boyhood one day he had successfully hidden his body in the coal-pile. He had been no comrade of other boys or of girls, and his acquaintances of a recent period were only a few fellow-invalids and the nurses at the Hood Sanitarium. All his life Bibbs had kept himself to himself—he was but a shy onlooker in the world. Nevertheless, the startled gaze he bent upon the unexpected lady before him had causes other than his shyness and her unexpectedness. For Mary Vertrees had been a shining figure in the little world of late given to the view of this humble and elusive outsider, and spectators sometimes find their hearts beating faster than those of the actors in the spectacle. Thus with Bibbs now. He started and stared; he lifted his hat with incredible awkwardness, his fingers fumbling at his forehead before they found the brim.

"Mr. Sheridan," said Mary, "I'm afraid you'll have to take me home with you. I——" She stopped, not lacking a momentary awkwardness of her own.

"Why—why—yes," Bibbs stammered. "I'll—I'll be de ——Won't you get in?"

In that manner and in that place they exchanged their first words. Then Mary without more ado got into the coupé, and Bibbs followed, closing the door.

"You're very kind," she said, somewhat breathlessly. "I should have had to walk, and it's beginning to get dark. It's three miles, I think."

"Yes," said Bibbs. "It—it is beginning to get dark. I—I noticed that."

"I ought to tell you—I——" Mary began, confusedly. She bit her lip, sat silent a moment, then spoke with composure. "It must seem odd, my——"

"No, no!" Bibbs protested, earnestly. "Not in the—in the least."

"It does, though," said Mary. "I had not intended to come to the cemetery, Mr. Sheridan, but one of the men in charge at the house came and whispered to me that 'the family wished me to'—I think your sister sent him. So I came. But when we reached here I—oh, I felt that perhaps I——"

Bibbs nodded gravely. "Yes, yes," he murmured.

"I got out on the opposite side of the carriage," she continued. "I mean opposite from—from where all of you were. And I wandered off over in the other direction; and I didn't realize how little time—it takes. From where I was I couldn't see the carriages leaving—at least I didn't notice them. So when I got back, just now, you were the only one here. I didn't know the other people in the carriage I came in, and of course they didn't think to wait for me. That's why——"

"Yes," said Bibbs, "I——" And that seemed all he had to say just then

Mary looked out through the dusty window. "I think we'd better be going home, if you please," she said.

"Yes," Bibbs agreed, not moving. "It will be dark before we get there."

She gave him a quick little glance. "I think you must be very tired, Mr. Sheridan; and I know you have reason to be," she said, gently. "If you'll let me, I'll——" And without explaining her purpose she opened the door on her side of the coupé and leaned out.

Bibbs stared in blank perplexity, not knowing what she meant to do.

"Driver!" she called, in her clear voice, loudly. "Driver! We'd like to start, please! Driver! Stop at the house just north

of Mr. Sheridan's, please." The wheels began to move, and she leaned back beside Bibbs once more. "I noticed that he was asleep when we got in," she said. "I suppose they have a great deal of night work."

Bibbs drew a long breath and waited till he could command his voice. "I've never been able to apologize quickly," he said, with his accustomed slowness, "because if I try to I stammer. My brother Roscoe whipped me once, when we were boys, for stepping on his slate-pencil. It took me so long to tell him it was an accident, he finished before I did."

Mary Vertrees had never heard anything quite like the drawling, gentle voice or the odd implication that his not noticing the motionless state of their vehicle was an "accident." She had formed a casual impression of him, not without sympathy, but at once she discovered that he was unlike any of her cursory and vague imaginings of him. And suddenly she saw a picture he had not intended to paint for sympathy; a sturdy boy hammering a smaller, sickly boy, and the sickly boy unresentful. Not that picture alone; others flashed before her. Instantaneously she had a glimpse of Bibbs's life and into his life. She had a queer feeling, new to her experience, of knowing him instantly. It startled her a little; and then, with some surprise, she realized that she was glad he had sat so long, after getting into the coupé, before he noticed that it had not started. What she did not realize, however, was that she had made no response to his apology, and they passed out of the cemetery gates, neither having spoken again.

Bibbs was so content with the silence he did not know that it was silence. The dusk, gathering in their small inclosure, was filled with a rich presence for him; and presently it was so dark that neither of the two could see the other, nor did even their garments touch. But neither had any sense of being alone. The wheels creaked steadily, rumbling presently on paved streets; there were the sounds, as from a distance, of the plod-plod of the horses; and sometimes the driver became audible, coughing asthmatically, or saying, "You, *Joe!*" with a spiritless flap of the whip upon an unresponsive back.

Oblongs of light from the lamps at street-corners came swimming into the interior of the coupé and, thinning rapidly to lances, passed utterly, leaving greater darkness. And yet neither of these two last attendants at Jim Sheridan's funeral broke the silence.

It was Mary who perceived the strangeness of it—too late. Abruptly she realized that for an indefinite interval she had been thinking of her companion and not talking to him. "Mr. Sheridan," she began, not knowing what she was going to say, but impelled to say anything, as she realized the queerness of this drive—"Mr. Sheridan, I——"

The coupé stopped. "You, *Joe!*" said the driver, reproachfully, and climbed down and opened the door.

"What's the trouble?" Bibbs inquired.

"Lady said stop at first house north of Mr. Sheridan's, sir."

Mary was incredulous; she felt that it couldn't be true and that it mustn't be true that they had driven all the way without speaking.

"What?" Bibbs demanded.

"We're there, sir," said the driver, sympathetically. "Next house north of Mr. Sheridan's."

Bibbs descended to the curb. "Why, yes," he said. "Yes, you seem to be right." And while he stood staring at the dimly illuminated front windows of Mr. Vertrees's house Mary got out, unassisted.

"Let me help you," said Bibbs, stepping toward her mechanically; and she was several feet from the coupé when he spoke.

"Oh no," she murmured. "I think I can——" She meant that she could get out of the coupé without help, but, perceiving that she had already accomplished this feat, she decided not to complete the sentence.

"You, *Joe!*" cried the driver, angrily, climbing to his box. And he rumbled away at his team's best pace—a snail's.

"Thank you for bringing me home, Mr. Sheridan," said Mary, stiffly. She did not offer her hand. "Good-night."

"Good-night," Bibbs said in response, and, turning with

her, walked beside her to the door. Mary made that a short walk; she almost ran. Realization of the queerness of their drive was growing upon her, beginning to shock her; she stepped aside from the light that fell through the glass panels of the door and withheld her hand as it touched the old-fashioned bell-handle.

"I'm quite safe, thank you," she said, with a little emphasis. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Bibbs, and went obediently. When he reached the street he looked back, but she had vanished within the house.

Moving slowly away, he caromed against two people who were turning out from the pavement to cross the street. They were Roscoe and his wife.

"Where are your eyes, Bibbs?" demanded Roscoe. "Sleep-walking, as usual?"

But Sibyl took the wanderer by the arm. "Come over to our house for a little while, Bibbs," she urged, "I want to——"

"No, I'd better——"

"Yes. I want you to. Your father's gone to bed, and they're all quiet over there—all worn out. Just come for a minute."

He yielded, and when they were in the house she repeated herself with real feeling: "'All worn out!' Well, if anybody is, *you* are, Bibbs! And I don't wonder: you've done every bit of the work of it. You mustn't get down sick again. I'm going to make you take a little brandy."

He let her have her own way, following her into the dining-room, and was grateful when she brought him a tiny glass filled from one of the decanters on the sideboard. Roscoe gloomily poured for himself a much heavier libation in a larger glass; and the two men sat, while Sibyl leaned against the sideboard, reviewing the episodes of the day and recalling the names of the donors of flowers and wreaths. She pressed Bibbs to remain longer when he rose to go, and then, as he persisted, she went with him to the front door. He opened it, and she said:

"Bibbs, you were coming out of the Vertreeses' house when we met you. How did you happen to be there?"

"I had only been to the door," he said. "Good-night, Sibyl."

"Wait," she insisted. "We saw you coming out."

"I wasn't," he explained, moving to depart. "I'd just brought Miss Vertrees home."

"What?" she cried.

"Yes," he said, and stepped out upon the porch, "that was it. Good-night, Sibyl."

"Wait!" she said, following him across the threshold. "How did that happen? I thought you were going to wait while those men filled the—the——" She paused, but moved nearer him insistently.

"I did wait. Miss Vertrees was there," he said, reluctantly. "She had walked away for a while and didn't notice that the carriages were leaving. When she came back the coupé waiting for me was the only one left."

Sibyl regarded him with dilating eyes. She spoke with a slow breathlessness. "And she drove home from Jim's funeral —with you!"

Without warning she burst into laughter, clapped her hand ineffectually over her mouth, and ran back uproariously into the house, hurling the door shut behind her.

CHAPTER XII

BIBBS went home pondering. He did not understand why Sibyl had laughed. The laughter itself had been spontaneous and beyond suspicion, but it seemed to him that she had only affected the effort to suppress it and that she wished it to be significant. Significant of what? And why had she wished to impress upon him the fact of her overwhelming amusement? He found no answer, but she had succeeded in disturbing him, and he wished that he had not encountered her.

At home uncles, aunts, and cousins from out of town were wandering about the house, several mournfully admiring the "Bay of Naples," and others occupied with the Moor and the plumbing, while they waited for trains. Edith and her mother had retired to some upper fastness, but Bibbs interviewed Jackson and had the various groups of relatives summoned to the dining-room for food. One great-uncle, old Gideon Sheridan from Boonville, could not be found, and Bibbs went in search of him. He ransacked the house, discovering the missing antique at last by accident. Passing his father's closed door on tiptoe, Bibbs heard a murmurous sound, and paused to listen. The sound proved to be a quavering and rickety voice, monotonously bleating:

"The Lo-ord givuth and the Lo-ord takuth away! We got to remember that; we got to remember that! I'm a-gittin' along, James; I'm a-gittin' along, and I've seen a-many of 'em go—two daughters and a son the Lord give me, and He has taken all away. For the Lo-ord givuth and the Lo-ord takuth away! Remember the words of Bildad the Shuhite, James. Bildad the Shuhite says, 'He shall have neither son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings.' Bildad the Shuhite——"

Bibbs opened the door softly. His father was lying upon the bed, in his underclothes, face downward, and Uncle Gideon sat near by, swinging backward and forward in a rocking-chair, stroking his long white beard and gazing at the ceiling as he talked. Bibbs beckoned him urgently, but Uncle Gideon paid no attention.

"Bildad the Shuhite spake and he says, 'If thy children have sinned against Him and He have cast them away——'"

There was a muffled explosion beneath the floor, and the windows rattled. The figure lying face downward on the bed did not move, but Uncle Gideon leaped from his chair. "My God!" he cried. "What's that?"

There came a second explosion, and Uncle Gideon ran out into the hall. Bibbs went to the head of the great staircase, and, looking down, discovered the source of the disturbance. Gideon's grandson, a boy of fourteen, had brought his camera to the funeral and was taking "flash-lights" of the Moor. Uncle Gideon, reassured by Bibbs's explanation, would have returned to finish his quotation from Bildad the Shuhite, but Bibbs detained him, and after a little argument persuaded him to descend to the dining-room whither Bibbs followed, after closing the door of his father's room.

He kept his eye on Gideon after dinner, diplomatically preventing several attempts on the part of that comforter to reascend the stairs; and it was a relief to Bibbs when George announced that an automobile was waiting to convey the ancient man and his grandson to their train. They were the last to leave; and when they had gone Bibbs went sighing to his own room.

He stretched himself wearily upon the bed, but presently rose, went to the window, and looked for a long time at the darkened house where Mary Vertrees lived. Then he opened his trunk, took therefrom a small note-book half filled with fragmentary scribblings, and began to write:

Laughter after a funeral. In this reaction people will laugh at anything and at nothing. The band plays a dirge on the way to the

cemetery, but when it turns back, and the mourning carriages are out of hearing, it strikes up, "Darktown Is Out To-night." That is natural—but there are women whose laughter is like the whirring of whips. Why is it that certain kinds of laughter seem to spoil something hidden away from the laughers? If they do not know of it, and have never seen it, how can their laughter hurt it? Yet it does.

Beauty is not out of place among grave-stones. It is not out of place anywhere. But a woman who has been betrothed to a man would not look beautiful at his funeral. A woman might look beautiful, though, at the funeral of a man whom she had known and liked. And in that case, too, she would probably not want to talk if she drove home from the cemetery with his brother; nor would she want the brother to talk. Silence is usually either stupid or timid. But for a man who stammers if he tries to talk fast, and drawls so slowly, when he doesn't stammer, that nobody has time to listen to him, silence is advisable. Nevertheless, too much silence is open to suspicion. It may be reticence, or it may be a vacuum.

Sometimes an imperceptible odour will become perceptible in a small inclosure, such as a closed carriage. The ghost of gasolene rising from a lady's glove might be sweeter to the man riding beside her than all the scents of Arcady in spring. It depends on the lady—but there *are!*

Three miles may be three hundred miles, or it may be three feet. When it is three feet you have not time to say a great deal before you reach the end of it. Still, it may be that one should begin to speak.

No one could help wishing to stay in a world that holds some of the people that are in this world. There are some so wonderful you do not understand how the dead *could* die. How could they let themselves?

A falling building does not care who falls with it. It does not choose who shall be upon its roof and who shall not.

Silence *can* be golden? Yes. But perhaps if a woman of the world should find herself by accident sitting beside a man for the length of time it must necessarily take two slow old horses to jog three miles, she might expect that man to say something of some sort! Even if she thought him a feeble hypochondriac, even if she had heard from others that he was a disappointment to his own people, even if she had seen for herself that he was a useless and irritating

encumbrance everywhere, she might expect him at least to speak —she might expect him to open his mouth and try to make sounds, if he only barked. If he did not even try, but sat every step of the way as dumb as a frozen fish, she might *think* him a frozen fish. And she might be right. She might be right if she thought him about as pleasant a companion as—as Bildad the Shuhite!

Bibbs closed his note-book, replacing it in his trunk. Then, after a period of melancholy contemplation, he undressed, put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and went softly out into the hall—to his father's door. Upon the floor was a tray which Bibbs had sent George, earlier in the evening, to place upon a table in Sheridan's room—but the food was untouched. Bibbs stood listening outside the door for several minutes. There came no sound from within, and he went back to his own room and to bed.

In the morning he woke to a state of being hitherto unknown in his experience. Sometimes in the process of waking there is a little pause—sleep has gone, but coherent thought has not begun. It is a curious half-void, a glimpse of aphasia; and although the person experiencing it may not know for that instant his own name or age or sex, he may be acutely conscious of depression or elation. It is the moment, as we say, before we "remember"; and for the first time in Bibbs's life it came to him bringing a vague happiness. He woke to a sense of new riches; he had the feeling of a boy waking to a birthday. But when the next moment brought him his memory, he found nothing that could explain his exhilaration. On the contrary, under the circumstances it seemed grotesquely unwarranted. However, it was a brief visitation and was gone before he had finished dressing. It left a little trail, the pleased recollection of it and the puzzle of it, which remained unsolved. And, in fact, waking happily in the morning is not usually the result of a drive home from a funeral. No wonder the sequence evaded Bibbs Sheridan!

His father had gone when he came downstairs. "Went on down to 's office, jes' same," Jackson informed him. "Came sat breakfas'-table, all by 'mself; eat nothin'. George bring

nice breakfas' but he di'n' eat a thing. Yessuh, went on downtown, jes' same he yoosta do. Yessuh, I reckon putty much ev'ything goin' go on same as it yoosta do."

It struck Bibbs that Jackson was right. The day passed as other days had passed. Mrs. Sheridan and Edith were in black, and Mrs. Sheridan cried a little, now and then, but no other external difference was to be seen. Edith was quiet, but not noticeably depressed, and at lunch proved herself able to argue with her mother upon the propriety of receiving calls in the earliest stages of "mourning." Lunch was as usual—for Jim and his father had always lunched downtown—and the afternoon was as usual. Bibbs went for his drive, and his mother went with him, as she sometimes did when the weather was pleasant. Altogether, the usualness of things was rather startling to Bibbs.

During the drive Mrs. Sheridan talked fragmentarily of Jim's childhood. "But you wouldn't remember about that," she said, after narrating an episode. "You were too little. He was always a good boy, just like that. And he'd save whatever papa gave him, and put it in the bank. I reckon it'll just about kill your father to put somebody in his place as president of the Realty Company, Bibbs. I know he can't move Roscoe over; he told me last week he'd already put as much on Roscoe as any one man could handle and not go crazy. Oh, it's a pity——" She stopped to wipe her eyes. "It's a pity you didn't run more with Jim, Bibbs, and kind o' pick up his ways. Think what it'd meant to papa now! You never did run with either Roscoe or Jim any, even before you got sick. Of course, you were younger; but it always *did* seem queer—and you three bein' brothers like that. I don't believe I ever saw you and Jim sit down together for a good talk in my life."

"Mother, I've been away so long," Bibbs returned, gently. "And since I came home I——"

"Oh, I ain't reproachin' you, Bibbs," she said. "Jim ain't been home much of an evening since you got back—what with his work and callin' and goin' to the theatre and places, and often not even at the house for dinner. Right the evening be-

fore he got hurt he had his dinner at some miser'ble rest'rant down by the Pump Works, he was so set on overseein' the night work and gettin' everything finished up right to the minute he told papa he would. I reckon you might 'a' put in more time with Jim if there'd been more opportunity, Bibbs. I expect you feel almost as if you scarcely really knew him right well."

"I suppose I really didn't, mother. He was busy, you see, and I hadn't much to say about the things that interested him, because I don't know much about them."

"It's a pity! Oh, it's a pity!" she moaned. "And you'll have to learn to know about 'em *now*, Bibbs! I haven't said much to you, because I felt it was all between your father and you, but I honestly do believe it will just kill him if he has to have any more trouble on top of all this! You mustn't *let* him, Bibbs—you mustn't! You don't know how he's grieved over you, and now he can't stand any more—he just can't! Whatever he says for you to do, you *do* it, Bibbs, you *do* it! I want you to promise me you will."

"I would if I could," he said, sorrowfully.

"No, no! Why can't you?" she cried, clutching his arm. "He wants you to go back to the machine-shop and——"

"And—'like it'!" said Bibbs.

"Yes, that's it—to go in a cheerful spirit. Dr. Gurney said it wouldn't hurt you if you went in a cheerful spirit—the doctor said that himself, Bibbs. So why can't you do it? Can't you do that much for your father? You ought to think what he's done for *you*. You got a beautiful house to live in; you got automobiles to ride in; you got fur coats and warm clothes; you been taken care of all your life. And you don't *know* how he worked for the money to give all these things to you! You don't *dream* what he had to go through and what he risked when we were startin' out in life; and you never *will* know! And now this blow has fallen on him out of a clear sky, and you make it out to be a hardship to do like he wants you to! And all on earth he asks is for you to go back to the

work in a cheerful spirit, so it won't hurt you! That's all he asks. Look, Bibbs, we're gettin' back near home, but before we get there I want you to promise me that you'll do what he asks you to. Promise me!"

In her earnestness she cleared away her black veil that she might see him better, and it blew out on the smoky wind. He readjusted it for her before he spoke.

"I'll go back in as cheerful a spirit as I can, mother," he said.

"There!" she exclaimed, satisfied. "That's a good boy! That's all I wanted you to say."

"Don't give me any credit," he said, ruefully. "There isn't anything else for me to do."

"Now, don't begin talkin' *that* way!"

"No, no," he soothed her. "We'll have to begin to make the spirit a cheerful one. We may——" They were turning into their own driveway as he spoke, and he glanced at the old house next door. Mary Vertrees was visible in the twilight, standing upon the front steps, bareheaded, the door open behind her. She bowed gravely.

"'We may'—what?" asked Mrs. Sheridan, with a slight impatience.

"What is it, mother?"

"You said, 'We may,' and didn't finish what you were sayin'."

"Did I?" said Bibbs, blankly. "Well, what *were* we saying?"

"Of all the queer boys!" she cried. "You always were. Always! You haven't forgot what you just promised me, have you?"

"No," he answered, as the car stopped. "No, the spirit will be as cheerful as the flesh will let it, mother. It won't do to behave like——"

His voice was low, and in her movement to descend from the car she failed to hear his final words.

"Behave like who, Bibbs?"

"Nothing."

But she was fretful in her grief. "You said it wouldn't do to behave like *somebody*. Behave like *who?*"

"It was just nonsense," he explained, turning to go in. "An obscure person I don't think much of lately."

"Behave like *who?*" she repeated, and upon his yielding to her petulant insistence, she made up her mind that the only thing to do was to tell Dr. Gurney about it.

"Like Bildad the Shuhite!" was what Bibbs said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE outward usualness of things continued after dinner. It was Sheridan's custom to read the evening paper beside the fire in the library, while his wife, sitting near by, either sewed (from old habit) or allowed herself to be repeatedly baffled by one of the simpler forms of solitaire. To-night she did neither, but sat in her customary chair, gazing at the fire, while Sheridan let the unfolded paper rest upon his lap, though now and then he lifted it, as if to read, and let it fall back upon his knees again. Bibbs came in noiselessly and sat in a corner, doing nothing; and from a "reception-room" across the hall an indistinct vocal murmur became just audible at intervals. Once, when this murmur grew louder, under stress of some irrepressible merriment, Edith's voice could be heard—"Bobby, aren't you awful!" and Sheridan glanced across at his wife appealingly.

She rose at once and went into the "reception-room"; there was a flurry of whispering, and the sound of tiptoeing in the hall—Edith and her suitor changing quarters to a more distant room. Mrs. Sheridan returned to her chair in the library.

"They won't bother you any more, papa," she said, in a comforting voice. "She told me at lunch he'd 'phoned he wanted to come up this evening, and I said I thought he'd better wait a few days, but she said she'd already told him he could." She paused, then added, rather guiltily: "I got kind of a notion maybe Roscoe don't like him as much as he used to. Maybe—maybe you better ask Roscoe, papa." And as Sheridan nodded solemnly, she concluded, in haste: "Don't say *I* said to. I might be wrong about it, anyway."

He nodded again, and they sat for some time in a silence which Mrs. Sheridan broke with a little sniff, having fallen

into a reverie that brought tears. "That Miss Vertrees was a good girl," she said. "*She* was all right."

Her husband evidently had no difficulty in following her train of thought, for he nodded once more, affirmatively.

"Did you—— How did you fix it about the—the Realty Company?" she faltered. "Did you——"

He rose heavily, helping himself to his feet by the arms of his chair. "I fixed it," he said, in a husky voice. "I moved Cantwell up, and put Johnston in Cantwell's place, and split up Johnston's work among four men with salaries high enough to take it." He went to her, put his hand upon her shoulder, and drew a long, audible, tremulous breath. "It's my bedtime, mamma; I'm goin' up." He dropped the hand from her shoulder and moved slowly away, but when he reached the door he stopped and spoke again, without turning to look at her. "The Realty Company'll go right on just the same," he said. "It's like—it's like sand, mamma. It puts me in mind of chuldern playin' in a sand-pile. One of 'em sticks his finger in the sand and makes a hole, and another of 'em'll pat the place with his hand, and all the little grains of sand run in and fill it up and settle against one another; and then, right away it's flat on top again, and you can't tell there ever was a hole there. The Realty Company'll go on all right, mamma. There ain't anything anywhere, I reckon, that wouldn't go right on—just the same."

And he passed out slowly into the hall; then they heard his heavy tread upon the stairs.

Mrs. Sheridan, rising to follow him, turned a piteous face to her son. "It's so forlorn," she said, chokingly. "That's the first time he spoke since he came in the house this evening. I know it must 'a' hurt him to hear Edith laughin' with that Lamhorn. She'd oughtn't to let him come, right the very first evening this way; she'd oughtn't to done it! She just seems to lose her head over him, and it scares me. You heard what Sibyl said the other day, and—and you heard what—what——"

"What Edith said to Sibyl?" Bibbs finished the sentence for her.

"We *can't* have any trouble o' *that* kind!" she wailed. "Oh, it looks as if movin' up to this New House had brought us awful bad luck! It scares me!" She put both her hands over her face. "Oh, Bibbs, Bibbs! if you only wasn't so *queer!* If you could only been a kind of dependable son! I don't know what we're all comin' to!" And, weeping, she followed her husband.

Bibbs gazed for a while at the fire; then he rose abruptly, like a man who has come to a decision, and briskly sought the room—it was called "the smoking-room"—where Edith sat with Mr. Lamhorn. They looked up in no welcoming manner, at Bibbs's entrance, and moved their chairs to a less conspicuous adjacency.

"Good-evening," said Bibbs, pleasantly; and he seated himself in a leather easy-chair near them.

"What is it?" asked Edith, plainly astonished.

"Nothing," he returned, smiling.

She frowned. "Did you want something?" she asked.

"Nothing in the world. Father and mother have gone upstairs; I sha'n't be going up for several hours, and there didn't seem to be anybody left for me to chat with except you and Mr. Lamhorn."

"'*Chat* with?'" she echoed, incredulously.

"I can talk about almost anything," said Bibbs with an air of genial politeness. "It doesn't matter to *me*. I don't know much about business—if that's what you happened to be talking about. But you aren't in business, are you, Mr. Lamhorn?"

"Not now," returned Lamhorn, shortly.

"I'm not, either," said Bibbs. "It was getting cloudier than usual, I noticed, just before dark, and there was wind from the southwest. Rain to-morrow, I shouldn't be surprised."

He seemed to feel that he had begun a conversation the support of which had now become the pleasurable duty of

other parties; and he sat expectantly, looking first at his sister, then at Lamhorn, as if implying that it was their turn to speak. Edith returned his gaze with a mixture of astonishment and increasing anger, while Mr. Lamhorn was obviously disturbed, though Bibbs had been as considerate as possible in presenting the weather as a topic. Bibbs had perceived that Lamhorn had nothing in his mind at any time except "personalities"—he could talk about people and he could make love. Bibbs, wishing to be courteous, offered the weather.

Lamhorn refused it, and concluded from Bibbs's luxurious attitude in the leather chair that this half-crazy brother was a permanent fixture for the rest of the evening. There was no reason to hope that he would move, and Lamhorn found himself in danger of looking silly.

"I was just going," he said, rising.

"Oh *no!*" Edith cried, sharply.

"Yes. Good-night! I think I——"

"Too bad," said Bibbs, genially, walking to the door with the visitor, while Edith stood staring as the two disappeared in the hall. She heard Bibbs offering to "help" Lamhorn with his overcoat and the latter rather curtly declining assistance, these episodes of departure being followed by the closing of the outer door. She ran into the hall.

"What's the matter with you?" she cried, furiously. "What do you *mean?* How did you dare come in there when you knew——"

Her voice broke; she made a gesture of rage and despair, and ran up the stairs, sobbing. She fled to her mother's room, and when Bibbs came up, a few minutes later, Mrs. Sheridan met him at his door.

"Oh, Bibbs," she said, shaking her head woefully, "you'd oughtn't to distress your sister! She says you drove that young man right out of the house. You'd ought to been more considerate."

Bibbs smiled faintly, noting that Edith's door was open, with Edith's naïve shadow motionless across its threshold.

"Yes," he said. "He doesn't appear to be much of a 'man's man.' He ran at just a glimpse of one."

Edith's shadow moved; her voice came quavering: "You call yourself one?"

"No, no," he answered. "I said, 'just a glimpse of one.' I didn't claim——" But her door slammed angrily; and he turned to his mother.

"There," he said, sighing. "That's almost the first time in my life I ever tried to be a man of action, mother, and I succeeded perfectly in what I tried to do. As a consequence I feel like a horse-thief!"

"You hurt her feelin's," she groaned. "You must 'a' gone at it too rough, Bibbs."

He looked upon her wanly. "That's my trouble, mother," he murmured. "I'm a plain, blunt fellow. I have rough ways, and I'm a rough man."

For once she perceived some meaning in his queerness. "Hush your nonsense!" she said, good-naturedly, the astral of a troubled smile appearing, "You go to bed."

He kissed her and obeyed.

Edith gave him a cold greeting the next morning at the breakfast-table.

"You mustn't do that under a misapprehension," he warned her, when they were alone in the dining-room.

"Do what under a what?" she asked.

"Speak to me. I came into the smoking-room last night 'on purpose,'" he told her, gravely. "I have a prejudice against that young man."

She laughed. "I guess you think it means a great deal who you have prejudices against!" In mockery she adopted the manner of one who implores. "Bibbs, for pity's sake *promise* me, *don't* use *your* influence with papa against him!" And she laughed louder.

"Listen," he said, with peculiar earnestness. "I'll tell you now, because—because I've decided I'm one of the family." And then, as if the earnestness were too heavy for him to

carry it further, he continued, in his usual tone. "I'm drunk with power, Edith."

"What do you want to tell me?" she demanded, brusquely.

"Lamhorn made love to Sibyl," he said.

Edith hooted. "*She* did to *him !* And because you overheard that spat between us the other day when I the same as accused her of it, and said something like that to you afterward——"

"No," he said, gravely. "I *know.*"

"How?"

"I was there, one day a week ago, with Roscoe, and I heard Sibyl and Lamhorn——"

Edith screamed with laughter. "You were with *Roscoe*—and you heard Lamhorn making love to Sibyl!"

"No. I heard them quarrelling."

"You're funnier than ever, Bibbs!" she cried. "You say he made love to her because you heard them quarrelling!"

"That's it. If you want to know what's 'between' people, you can—by the way they quarrel."

"You'll kill me, Bibbs! What were they quarrelling about?"

"Nothing. That's how I knew. People who quarrel over nothing!—it's always certain——"

Edith stopped laughing abruptly, but continued her mockery, "You ought to know. You've had so much experience, yourself!"

"I haven't any, Edith," he said. "My life has been about as exciting as an incubator chicken's. But I look out through the glass at things."

"Well, then," she said, "if you look out through the glass you must know what effect such stuff would have upon *me !*" She rose, visibly agitated. "What if it *was* true?" she demanded, bitterly. "What if it was true a hundred times over? You sit there with your silly face half ready to giggle and half ready to sniffle, and tell me stories like that, about Sibyl picking on Bobby Lamhorn and worrying him to death, and you think it matters to *me ?* What if I already *knew* all about their 'quarrelling'? What if I understood *why* she——" She

broke off with a violent gesture, a sweep of her arm extended at full length, as if she hurled something to the ground. "Do you think a girl that really cared for a man would pay any attention to *that?* Or to *you*, Bibbs Sheridan!"

He looked at her steadily, and his gaze was as keen as it was steady. She met it with unwavering pride. Finally he nodded slowly, as if she had spoken and he meant to agree with what she said.

"Ah, yes," he said. "I won't come into the smoking-room again. I'm sorry, Edith. Nobody can make you see anything now. You'll never see until you see for yourself. The rest of us will do better to keep out of it—especially me!"

"That's sensible," she responded, curtly. "You're most surprising of all when you're sensible, Bibbs."

"Yes," he sighed. "I'm a dull dog. Shake hands and forgive me, Edith."

Thawing so far as to smile, she underwent this brief ceremony, and George appeared, summoning Bibbs to the library; Dr. Gurney was waiting there, he announced. And Bibbs gave his sister a shy but friendly touch upon the shoulder as a complement to the handshaking, and left her.

Dr. Gurney was sitting by the log fire, alone in the room, and he merely glanced over his shoulder when his patient came in. He was not over fifty, in spite of Sheridan's habitual "ole Doc Gurney." He was gray, however, almost as thin as Bibbs, and nearly always he looked drowsy.

"Your father telephoned me yesterday afternoon, Bibbs," he said, not rising. "Wants me to 'look you over' again. Come around here in front of me—between me and the fire. I want to see if I can see through you."

"You mean you're too sleepy to move," returned Bibbs, complying. "I think you'll notice that I'm getting worse."

"Taken on about twelve pounds," said Gurney. "Thirteen, maybe."

"Twelve."

"Well, it won't do." The doctor rubbed his eyelids. "You're so much better I'll have to use some machinery on

you before we can know just where you are. You come down to my place this afternoon. Walk down—all the way. I suppose you know why your father wants to know."

Bibbs nodded. "Machine-shop."

"Still hate it?"

Bibbs nodded again.

"Don't blame you!" the doctor grunted. "Yes, I expect it'll make a lump in your gizzard again. Well, what do you say? Shall I tell him you've got the old lump there yet? You still want to write, do you?"

"What's the use?" Bibbs said, smiling ruefully. "My kind of writing!"

"Yes," the doctor agreed. "I suppose if you broke away and lived on roots and berries until you began to 'attract the favourable attention of editors' you might be able to hope for an income of four or five hundred dollars a year by the time you're fifty."

"That's about it," Bibbs murmured.

"Of course I know what you want to do," said Gurney, drowsily. "You don't hate the machine-shop only; you hate the whole show—the noise and jar and dirt, the scramble—the whole bloomin' craze to 'get on.' You'd like to go somewhere in Algiers, or to Taormina, perhaps, and bask on a balcony, smelling flowers and writing sonnets. You'd grow fat on it and have a delicate little life all to yourself. Well, what do you say? I can lie like sixty, Bibbs! Shall I tell your father he'll lose another of his boys if you don't go to Sicily?"

"I don't want to go to Sicily," said Bibbs. "I want to stay right here."

The doctor's drowsiness disappeared for a moment, and he gave his patient a sharp glance. "It's a risk," he said. "I think we'll find you're so much better he'll send you back to the shop pretty quick. Something's got hold of you lately; you're not quite so lackadaisical as you used to be. But I warn you: I think the shop will knock you just as it did before, and perhaps even harder, Bibbs."

He rose, shook himself, and rubbed his eyelids. "Well,

when we go over you this afternoon what are we going to say about it?"

"Tell him I'm ready," said Bibbs, looking at the door.

"Oh, no," Gurney laughed. "Not quite yet; but you may be almost. We'll see. Don't forget I said to walk down."

And when the examination was concluded, that afternoon, the doctor informed Bibbs that the result was much too satisfactory to be pleasing. "Here's a new 'situation' for a one-act farce," he said, gloomily, to his next patient when Bibbs had gone. "Doctor tells a man he's well, and that's his death sentence, likely. Dam' funny world!"

Bibbs decided to walk home, though Gurney had not instructed him upon this point. In fact, Gurney seemed to have no more instructions on any point, so discouraging was the young man's improvement. It was a dingy afternoon, and the smoke was evident not only to Bibbs's sight, but to his nostrils, though most of the pedestrians were so saturated with the smell that they could no longer detect it. Nearly all of them walked hurriedly, too intent upon their destinations to be more than half aware of the wayside; they wore the expressions of people under a vague yet constant strain. They were all lightly powdered, inside and out, with fine dust and grit from the hard-paved streets, and they were unaware of that also. They did not even notice that they saw the smoke, though the thickened air was like a shrouding mist. And when Bibbs passed the new "Sheridan Apartments," now almost completed, he observed that the marble of the vestibule was already streaky with soot, like his gloves, which were new.

That recalled to him the faint odour of gasolene in the coupé on the way from his brother's funeral, and this incited a train of thought that continued till he reached the vicinity of his home. His route was by a street parallel to that on which the New House fronted, and in his preoccupation he walked a block farther than he intended, so that, having crossed to his own street, he approached the New House from the north, and as he came to the corner of Mr. Vertrees's lot

Mr. Vertrees's daughter emerged from the front door and walked thoughtfully down the path to the old picket gate. She was unconscious of the approach of the pedestrian from the north, and did not see him until she had opened the gate and he was almost beside her. Then she looked up, and as she saw him she started visibly. And if this thing had happened to Robert Lamhorn, he would have had a thought far beyond the horizon of faint-hearted Bibbs's thoughts. Lamhorn, indeed, would have spoken his thought. He would have said:

"You jumped because you were thinking of me!"

CHAPTER XIV

MARY was the picture of a lady flustered. She stood with one hand closing the gate behind her, and she had turned to go in the direction Bibbs was walking. There appeared to be nothing for it but that they should walk together, at least as far as the New House. But Bibbs had paused in his slow stride, and there elapsed an instant before either spoke or moved—it was no longer than that, and yet it sufficed for each to seem to say, by look and attitude, "Why, it's *you!*"

Then they both spoke at once, each hurriedly pronouncing the other's name as if about to deliver a message of importance. Then both came to a stop simultaneously, but Bibbs made a heroic effort, and as they began to walk on together he contrived to find his voice.

"I—I—hate a frozen fish myself," he said. "I think three miles was too long for you to put up with one."

"Good gracious!" she cried, turning to him a glowing face from which restraint and embarrassment had suddenly fled. "Mr. Sheridan, you're lovely to put it that way. But it's always the girl's place to say it's turning cooler! I ought to have been the one to show that we didn't know each other well enough not to say *something!* It was an imposition for me to have made you bring me home, and after I went into the house I decided I should have walked. Besides, it wasn't three miles to the car-line. I never thought of it!"

"No," said Bibbs, earnestly. "I didn't, either. I might have said something if I'd thought of anything. I'm talking now, though; I must remember that, and not worry about it later. I think I'm talking, though it doesn't sound intelligent even to me. I made up my mind that if I ever met you again I'd turn on my voice and keep it going, no matter what it said. I——"

She interrupted him with laughter, and Mary Vertrees's laugh was one which Bibbs's father had declared, after the house-warming, "a cripple would crawl five miles to hear." And at the merry lilting of it Bibbs's father's son took heart to forget some of his trepidation. "I'll be any kind of idiot," he said, "if you'll laugh at me some more. It won't be difficult for me."

She did; and Bibbs's cheeks showed a little actual colour, which Mary perceived. It recalled to her, by contrast, her careless and irritated description of him to her mother just after she had seen him for the first time, "Rather tragic and altogether impossible" It seemed to her now that she must have been blind.

They had passed the New House without either of them showing—or possessing—any consciousness that it had been the destination of one of them.

"I'll keep on talking," Bibbs continued, cheerfully, "and you keep on laughing. I'm amounting to something in the world this afternoon. I'm making a noise, and that makes you make music. Don't be bothered by my bleating out such things as that. I'm really frightened, and that makes me bleat anything. I'm frightened about two things: I'm afraid of what I'll think of myself later if I don't keep talking—talking now, I mean—and I'm afraid of what I'll think of myself if I do And besides these two things, I'm frightened anyhow. I don't remember talking as much as this more than once or twice in my life. I suppose it was always in me to do it, though, the first time I met any one who didn't know me well enough not to listen."

"But you're not really talking to me," said Mary. "You're just thinking aloud."

"No," he returned, gravely. "I'm not thinking at all; I'm only making vocal sounds because I believe it's more mannerly. I seem to be the subject of what little meaning they possess, and I'd like to change it, but I don't know how. I haven't any experience in talking, and I don't know how to manage it."

"You needn't change the subject on my account, Mr. Sheridan," she said. "Not even if you really talked about yourself." She turned her face toward him as she spoke, and Bibbs caught his breath; he was pathetically amazed by the look she gave him. It was a glowing look, warmly friendly and understanding, and, what almost shocked him, it was an eagerly interested look. Bibbs was not accustomed to anything like that.

"I—you—I—I'm——" he stammered, and the faint colour in his cheeks grew almost vivid.

She was still looking at him, and she saw the strange radiance that came into his face. There was something about him, too, that explained how "queer" many people might think him; but he did not seem "queer" to Mary Vertrees; he seemed the most quaintly natural person she had ever met.

He waited, and became coherent. "*You* say something now," he said. "I don't even belong in the chorus, and here I am, trying to sing the funny man's solo! You——"

"No," she interrupted. "I'd rather play your accompaniment."

"I'll stop and listen to it, then."

"Perhaps——" she began, but after pausing thoughtfully she made a gesture with her muff, indicating a large brick church which they were approaching. "Do you see that church, Mr. Sheridan?"

"I suppose I could," he answered in simple truthfulness, looking at her. "But I don't want to. Once, when I was ill, the nurse told me I'd better say anything that was on my mind, and I got the habit. The other reason I don't want to see the church is that I have a feeling it's where you're going, and where I'll be sent back."

She shook her head in cheery negation. "Not unless you want to be. Would you like to come with me?"

"Why—why—yes," he said. "Anywhere!" And again it was apparent that he spoke in simple truthfulness.

"Then come—if you care for organ music. The organist is an old friend of mine, and sometimes he plays for me. He's

a dear old man. He had a degree from Bonn, and was a professor afterward, but he gave up everything for music. That's he, waiting in the doorway. He looks like Beethoven, doesn't he? I think he knows that, perhaps, and enjoys it a little. I hope so."

"Yes," said Bibbs, as they reached the church steps. "I think Beethoven would like it, too. It must be pleasant to look like other people."

"I haven't kept you?" Mary said to the organist.

"No, no," he answered, heartily. "I would not mind so only you should shooer come!"

"This is Mr. Sheridan, Dr. Kraft. He has come to listen with me."

The organist looked bluntly surprised. "Iss that *so?*" he exclaimed. "Well, I am glad if you wish him, and if he can stant my liddle playink. He iss musician himself, then, of course."

"No," said Bibbs, as the three entered the church together. "I—I—played the—I tried to play——" Fortunately he checked himself; he had been about to offer the information that he had failed to master the jew's-harp in his boyhood. "No, I'm not a musician," he contented himself with saying.

"What?" Dr. Kraft's surprise increased. "Young man, you are fortunate! I play for Miss Vertrees; she comes always alone. You are the first. You are the first one *ever!*"

They had reached the head of the central aisle, and as the organist finished speaking Bibbs stopped short, turning to look at Mary Vertrees in a dazed way that was not of her perceiving; for, though she stopped as he did, her gaze followed the organist, who was walking away from them toward the front of the church, shaking his white Beethovian mane roguishly.

"It's false pretenses on my part," Bibbs said. "You mean to be kind to the sick, but I'm not an invalid any more. I'm so well I'm going back to work in a few days. I'd better leave before he begins to play, hadn't I?"

"No," said Mary, beginning to walk forward. "Not unless you don't like great music."

He followed her to a seat about halfway up the aisle while Dr. Kraft ascended to the organ. It was an enormous one, the procession of pipes ranging from long, starveling whistles to thundering fat guns; they covered all the rear wall of the church, and the organist's figure, reaching its high perch, looked like that of some Lilliputian magician ludicrously daring the attempt to control a monster certain to overwhelm him.

"This afternoon some Handel!" he turned to shout.

Mary nodded. "Will you like that?" she asked Bibbs.

"I don't know. I never heard any except 'Largo.' I don't know anything about music. I don't even know how to pretend I do. If I knew enough to pretend, I would."

"No," said Mary, looking at him and smiling faintly, "you wouldn't."

She turned away as a great sound began to swim and tremble in the air; the huge empty space of the church filled with it; and the two people listening filled with it; the universe seemed to fill and thrill with it. The two sat intensely still, the great sound all round about them, while the church grew dusky, and only the organist's lamp made a tiny star of light. His white head moved from side to side beneath it rhythmically, or lunged and recovered with the fierceness of a duellist thrusting, but he was magnificently the master of his giant, and it sang to his magic as he bade it.

Bibbs was swept away upon that mighty singing. Such a thing was wholly unknown to him; there had been no music in his meagre life. Unlike the tale, it was the Princess Bedrulbudour who had brought him to the enchanted cave, and that—for Bibbs—was what made its magic dazing. It seemed for him a long, long time since he had been walking home drearily from Dr. Gurney's office; it seemed to him that he had set out upon a happy journey since then, and that he had reached another planet, where Mary Vertrees and he sat alone together listening to a vast choiring of invisible

soldiers and holy angels. There were armies of voices about them singing praise and thanksgiving; and yet they were alone. It was incredible that the walls of the church were not the boundaries of the universe, to remain so forever; incredible that there was a smoky street just yonder, where housemaids were bringing in evening papers from front steps and where children were taking their last spins on roller-skates before being haled indoors for dinner.

He had a curious sense of communication with his new friend. He knew it could not be so, and yet he felt as if all the time he spoke to her, saying: "You hear this strain? You hear that strain? You know the dream that these sounds bring to me?" And it seemed to him as though she answered continually: "I hear! I hear that strain, and I hear the new one that you are hearing now. I know the dream that these sounds bring to you. Yes, yes, I hear it all! We hear—together!"

And though the church grew so dim that all was mysterious shadow except the vague planes of the windows and the organist's light, with the white head moving beneath it, Bibbs had no consciousness that the girl sitting beside him had grown shadowy; he seemed to see her as plainly as ever in the darkness, though he did not look at her. And all the mighty chanting of the organ's multitudinous voices that afternoon seemed to Bibbs to be chorusing of her and interpreting her, singing her thoughts and singing for him the world of humble gratitude that was in his heart because she was so kind to him. It all meant Mary.

CHAPTER XV

BUT when she asked him what it meant, on their homeward way, he was silent. They had come a few paces from the church without speaking, walking slowly.

"I'll tell you what it meant to me," she said, as he did not immediately reply. "Almost any music of Handel's always means one thing above all others to me: courage! That's it. It makes cowardice or whining seem so infinitesimal—it makes *most* things in our hustling little lives seem infinitesimal."

"Yes," he said. "It seems odd, doesn't it, that people downtown are hurrying to trains and hanging to straps in trolley-cars, weltering every way to get home and feed and sleep so they can get downtown to-morrow. And yet there isn't anything down there worth getting to. They're like servants drudging to keep the house going, and believing the drudgery itself is the great thing. They make so much noise and fuss and dirt they forget that the house was meant to live in. The housework has to be done, but the people who do it have been so overpaid that they're confused and worship the housework. They're overpaid, and yet, poor things! they haven't anything that a chicken can't have. Of course, when the world gets to paying its wages sensibly that will be different."

"Do you mean 'communism'?" she asked, and she made their slow pace a little slower—they had only three blocks to go.

"Whatever the word is, I only mean that things don't look very sensible now—especially to a man that wants to keep out of 'em and can't! 'Communism?' Well, at least any 'decent sport' would say it's fair for all the strong runners to start from the same mark and give the weak ones a fair

distance ahead, so that all can run something like even on the stretch. And wouldn't it be pleasant, really, if they could all cross the winning-line together? Who really enjoys beating anybody—if he sees the beaten man's face? The only way we can enjoy getting ahead of other people nowadays is by forgetting what the other people feel. And that," he added, "is nothing of what the music meant to me. You see, if I keep talking about what it didn't mean I can keep from telling you what it did mean."

"Didn't it mean courage to you, too—a little?" she asked. "Triumph and praise were in it, and somehow those things mean courage to me."

"Yes, they were all there," Bibbs said. "I don't know the name of what he played, but I shouldn't think it would matter much. The man that makes the music must leave it to you what it can mean to you, and the name he puts to it can't make much difference—except to himself and people very much like him, I suppose."

"I suppose that's true, though I'd never thought of it like that."

"I imagine music must make feelings and paint pictures in the minds of the people who hear it," Bibbs went on, musingly, "according to their own natures as much as according to the music itself. The musician might compose something and play it, wanting you to think of the Holy Grail, and some people who heard it would think of a prayer-meeting, and some would think of how good they were themselves, and a boy might think of himself at the head of a solemn procession, carrying a banner and riding a white horse. And then, if there were some jubilant passages in the music, he'd think of a circus."

They had reached her gate, and she set her hand upon it, but did not open it. Bibbs felt that this was almost the kindest of her kindnesses—not to be prompt in leaving him.

"After all," she said, "you didn't tell me whether you liked it."

"No. I didn't need to."

"No, that's true, and I didn't need to ask. I knew. But you said you were trying to keep from telling me what it did mean."

"I can't keep from telling it any longer," he said. "The music meant to me—it meant the kindness of—of you."

"Kindness? How?"

"You thought I was a sort of lonely tramp—and sick——"

"No," she said, decidedly. "I thought perhaps you'd like to hear Dr. Kraft play. And you did."

"It's curious; sometimes it seemed to me that it was you who were playing."

Mary laughed. "I? I strum! Piano. A little Chopin—Grieg—Chaminade. You wouldn't listen!"

Bibbs drew a deep breath. "I'm frightened again," he said, in an unsteady voice. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm pushing, but——" He paused, and the words sank to a murmur.

"Oh, if you want *me* to play for you!" she said. "Yes, gladly. It will be merely absurd after what you heard this afternoon. I play like a hundred thousand other girls, and I like it. I'm glad when anyone's willing to listen, and if you——" She stopped, checked by a sudden recollection, and laughed ruefully. "But my piano won't be here after to-night. I—I'm sending it away to-morrow. I'm afraid that if you'd like me to play to you you'd have to come this evening."

"You'll let me?" he cried.

"Certainly, if you care to."

"If *I* could play——" he said, wistfully, "if I could play like that old man in the church I could thank you."

"Ah, but you haven't heard me play. I *know* you liked this afternoon, but——"

"Yes," said Bibbs. "It was the greatest happiness I've ever known."

It was too dark to see his face, but his voice held such plain honesty, and he spoke with such complete unconsciousness of saying anything especially significant, that she knew

it was the truth. For a moment she was nonplussed, then she opened the gate and went in. "You'll come after dinner, then?"

"Yes," he said, not moving. "Would you mind if I stood here until time to come in?"

She had reached the steps, and at that she turned, offering him the response of laughter and a gay gesture of her muff toward the lighted windows of the New House, as though bidding him to run home to his dinner.

That night, Bibbs sat writing in his note-book.

Music can come into a blank life and fill it. Everything that is beautiful is music, if you can listen.

There is no gracefu ness like that of a graceful woman at a grand piano. There is a swimming loveliness of line that seems to merge with the running of the sound, and you seem, as you watch her, to see what you are hearing and to hear what you are seeing.

There are women who make you think of pine woods coming down to a sparkling sea. The air about such a woman is bracing, and when she is near you, you feel strong and ambitious; you forget that the world doesn't like you. You think that perhaps you are a great fellow, after all. Then you come away and feel like a boy who has fallen in love with his Sunday-school teacher. You'll be whipped for it—and ought to be.

There are women who make you think of Diana, crowned with the moon. But they do not have the "Greek profile." I do not believe Helen of Troy had a "Greek profile"; they would not have fought about her if her nose had been quite that long. The Greek nose is not the adorable nose. The adorable nose is about an eighth of an inch shorter.

Much of the music of Wagner, it appears, is not suitable to the piano. Wagner was a composer who could interpret into music such things as the primitive impulses of humanity—he could have made a machine-shop into music. But not if he had to work in it. Wagner was always dealing in immensities—a machine-shop would have put a majestic lump in so grand a gizzard as that.

There is a mystery about pianos, it seems. Sometimes they have to be "sent away." That is how some people speak of the penitentiary. "Sent away" is a euphemism for "sent to prison." But pianos

are not sent to prison, and they are not sent to the tuner—the tuner is sent to them. Why are pianos "sent away"—and where?

Sometimes a glorious day shines into the most ordinary and useless life. Happiness and beauty come carolling out of the air into the gloomy house of that life as if some stray angel just happened to perch on the roof-tree, resting and singing. And the night after such a day is lustrous and splendid with the memory of it. Music and beauty and kindness—those are the three greatest things God can give us. To bring them all in one day to one who expected nothing—ah! the heart that received them should be as humble as it is thankful. But it is hard to be humble when one is so rich with new memories. It is impossible to be humble after a day of glory.

Yes—the adorable nose is more than an eighth of an inch shorter than the Greek nose. It is a full quarter of an inch shorter.

There are women who will be kinder to a sick tramp than to a conquering hero. But the sick tramp had better remember that's what he is. Take care, take care! Humble's the word!

CHAPTER XVI

THAT "mystery about pianos" which troubled Bibbs had been a mystery to Mr. Vertrees, and it was being explained to him at about the time Bibbs scribbled the reference to it in his notes. Mary had gone upstairs upon Bibbs's departure at ten o'clock, and Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees sat until after midnight in the library, talking. And in all that time they found not one cheerful topic, but became more depressed with everything and with every phase of everything that they discussed—no extraordinary state of affairs in a family which has always "held up its head," only to arrive in the end at a point where all it can do is to look on helplessly at the processes of its own financial dissolution. For that was the point which this despairing couple had reached—they could do nothing except look on and talk about it. They were only vapouring, and they knew it.

"She needn't to have done that about her piano," vapoured Mr. Vertrees. "We could have managed somehow without it. At least she ought to have consulted me, and if she insisted I could have arranged the details with the—the dealer."

"She thought that it might be—annoying for you," Mrs. Vertrees explained. "Really, she planned for you not to know about it until they had removed—until after to-morrow, that is, but I decided to—to mention it. You see, she didn't even tell me about it until this morning. She has another idea, too, I'm afraid. It's—it's——"

"Well?" he urged, as she found it difficult to go on.

"Her other idea is—that is, it was—I think it can be avoided, of course—it was about her furs."

"No!" he exclaimed, quickly. "I won't have it! You must see to that. I'd rather not talk to her about it, but you mustn't let her."

"I'll try not," his wife promised. "Of course, they're very handsome."

"All the more reason for her to keep them!" he returned, irritably. "We're not *that* far gone, I think!"

"Perhaps not yet," Mrs. Vertrees said. "She seems to be troubled about the—the coal matter and—about Tilly. Of course the piano will take care of some things like those for a while and——"

"I don't like it. I gave her the piano to play on, not to——"

"You mustn't be distressed about it in *one* way," she said, comfortingly. "She arranged with the—with the purchaser that the men will come for it about half after five in the afternoon. The days are so short now it's really quite winter."

"Oh yes," he agreed, moodily. "So far as that goes people have a right to move a piece of furniture without stirring up the neighbours, I suppose, even by daylight. I don't suppose *our* neighbours are paying much attention just now, though I hear Sheridan was back in his office early the morning after the funeral."

Mrs. Vertrees made a little sound of commiseration. "I don't believe that was because he wasn't suffering, though. I'm sure it was only because he felt his business was so important. Mary told me he seemed wrapped up in his sons' succeeding; and that was what he bragged about most. He isn't vulgar in his boasting, I understand; he doesn't talk a great deal about his—his actual money—though there was something about blades of grass that I didn't comprehend. I think he meant something about his energy—but perhaps not. No, his bragging usually seemed to be not so much a personal vainglory as about his family and the greatness of this city."

"'Greatness of this city!'" Mr. Vertrees echoed, with dull bitterness. "It's nothing but a coal-hole! I suppose it looks 'great' to the man who has the luck to make it work for him. I suppose it looks 'great' to any *young* man, too, starting out to make his fortune out of it. The fellows that get what

they want out of it say it's 'great,' and everybody else gets the habit. But you have a different point of view if it's the city that got what it wanted out of you! Of course Sheridan says it's 'great.'"

Mrs. Vertrees seemed unaware of this unusual outburst. "I believe," she began, timidly, "he doesn't boast of—that is, I understand he has never seemed so interested in the—the other one."

Her husband's face was dark, but at that a heavier shadow fell upon it; he looked more haggard than before. "'The other one,'" he repeated, averting his eyes. "You mean—you mean the third son—the one that was here this evening?"

"Yes, the—the youngest," she returned, her voice so feeble it was almost a whisper.

And then neither of them spoke for several long minutes. Nor did either look at the other during that silence.

At last Mr. Vertrees contrived to cough, but not convincingly. "What—ah—what was it Mary said about him out in the hall, when she came in this afternoon? I heard you asking her something about him, but she answered in such a low voice I didn't—ah—happen to catch it."

"She—she didn't say much. All she said was this: I asked her if she had enjoyed her walk with him, and she said, 'He's the most wistful creature I've ever known.'"

"Well?"

"That was all. He *is* wistful-looking; and so fragile—though he doesn't seem quite so much so lately. I was watching Mary from the window when she went out to-day, and he joined her, and if I hadn't known about him I'd have thought he had quite an interesting face."

"If you 'hadn't known about him'? Known what?"

"Oh, nothing, of course," she said, hurriedly. "Nothing definite, that is. Mary said decidedly, long ago, that he's not at all insane, as we thought at first. It's only—well, of course it *is* odd, their attitude about him. I suppose it's some nervous trouble that makes him—perhaps a little queer at times, so that he can't apply himself to anything—or

perhaps does odd things. But, after all, of course, we only have an impression about it. We don't know—that is, positively. I——" She paused, then went on: "I didn't know just how to ask—that is—I didn't mention it to Mary. I didn't—— I——" The poor lady floundered pitifully, concluding with a mumble. "So soon after—after the—the shock."

"I don't think I've caught more than a glimpse of him," said Mr. Vertrees. "I wouldn't know him if I saw him, but your impression of him is——" He broke off suddenly, springing to his feet in agitation. "I can't imagine her—oh *no!*" he gasped. And he began to pace the floor. "A half-witted epileptic!"

"No, no!" she cried. "He may be all right. We——"

"Oh, it's horrible! I can't——" He threw himself back into his chair again, sweeping his hands across his face, then letting them fall limply at his sides.

Mrs. Vertrees was tremulous. "You mustn't give way so," she said, inspired for once almost to direct discourse. "Whatever Mary might think of doing, it wouldn't be on her own account; it would be on ours. But if *we* should—should consider it, that wouldn't be on *our* own account. It isn't because we think of ourselves."

"Oh God, no!" he groaned. "Not for us! We can go to the poorhouse, but Mary can't be a stenographer!"

Sighing, Mrs. Vertrees resumed her obliqueness. "Of course," she murmured, "it all seems very premature, speculating about such things, but I had a queer sort of feeling that she seemed quite interested in this——" She had almost said "in this one," but checked herself. "In this young man. It's natural, of course; she is always so strong and well, and he is—he seems to be, that is—rather appealing to the —the sympathies."

"Yes!" he agreed, bitterly. "Precisely. The sympathies!"

"Perhaps," she faltered—"perhaps you might feel easier if I could have a little talk with someone?"

"With whom?"

"I had thought of—not going about it too brusquely, or course, but perhaps just waiting for his name to be mentioned, if I happened to be talking with somebody that knew the family—and then I might find a chance to say that I was sorry to hear he'd been ill so much, and—— Something of that kind perhaps?"

"You don't know anybody that knows the family."

"Yes. That is—well, in a way, of course, one *of* the family. That Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan is not a—that is, she's rather a pleasant-faced little woman, I think, and of course rather ordinary. I think she is interested about—that is, of course, she'd be anxious to be more intimate with Mary, naturally. She's always looking over here from her house; she was looking out of the window this afternoon when Mary went out, I noticed—though I don't think Mary saw her. I'm sure she wouldn't think it out of place to—to be frank about matters. She called the other day, and Mary must rather like her—she said that evening that the call had done her good. Don't you think it might be wise?"

"Wise? I don't know. I feel that the whole matter is impossible."

"Yes, so do I," she returned, promptly. "It isn't really a thing we should be considering seriously, of course. Still——"

"I should say not! But possibly——"

Thus they skirmished up and down the field; but before they turned the lights out and went upstairs it was thoroughly understood between them that Mrs. Vertrees should seek the earliest opportunity to obtain definite information from Sibyl Sheridan concerning the mental and physical status of Bibbs. And if he were subject to attacks of lunacy, the unhappy pair decided to prevent the sacrifice they supposed their daughter intended to make of herself. Altogether, if there were spiteful ghosts in the old house that night, eavesdropping upon the woeful comedy, they must have died anew of laughter!

Mrs. Vertrees's opportunity occurred the very next afternoon. Darkness had fallen, and the piano-movers had come.

They were carrying the piano down the front steps, and Mrs. Vertrees was standing in the open doorway behind them, preparing to withdraw, when she heard a sharp exclamation; and Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan, bareheaded, emerged from the shadow into the light of the doorway.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "It did give me a fright!"

"It's Mrs. Sheridan, isn't it?" Mrs. Vertrees was perplexed by this informal appearance, but she reflected that it might be providential. "Won't you come in?"

"No. Oh no, thank you!" Sybil panted, pressing her hand to her side. "You don't know what a fright you've given me! And it was nothing but your piano!" She laughed shrilly. "You know, since our tragedy coming so suddenly the other day, you have no idea how upset I've been—almost hysterical! And I just glanced out of the window, a minute or so ago, and saw your door wide open and black figures of men against the light, carrying something heavy, and I almost fainted. You see, it was just the way it looked when I saw them bringing my poor brother-in-law in, next door, only such a few short days ago. And I thought I'd seen your daughter start for a drive with Bibbs Sheridan in a car about three o'clock—and—— They aren't back yet, are they?"

"No. Good heavens!"

"And the only thing I could think of was that something must have happened to them, and I just dashed over—and it was only your *piano!*" She broke into laughter again. "I suppose you're just sending it somewhere to be repaired, aren't you?"

"It's—it's being taken downtown," said Mrs. Vertrees. "Won't you come in and make me a little visit? I was *so* sorry, the other day, that I was—ah——" She stopped inconsequently, then repeated her invitation. "Won't you come in? I'd really——"

"Thank you, but I must be running back. My husband usually gets home about this time, and I make a little point of it always to be there."

"That's very sweet." Mrs. Vertrees descended the steps

and walked toward the street with Sibyl. "It's quite balmy for so late in November, isn't it? Almost like a May evening."

"I'm afraid Miss Vertrees will miss her piano," said Sibyl, watching the instrument disappear into the big van at the curb. "She plays wonderfully, Mrs. Kittersby tells me."

"Yes, she plays very well. One of your relatives came to hear her yesterday, after dinner, and I think she played all evening for him."

"You mean Bibbs?" asked Sibyl.

"The—the youngest Mr. Sheridan. Yes. He's very musical, isn't he?"

"I never heard of it. But I shouldn't think it would matter much whether he was or not, if he could get Miss Vertrees to play to him. Does your daughter expect the piano back soon?"

"I—I believe not immediately. Mr. Sheridan came last evening to hear her play because she had arranged with the —that is, it was to be removed this afternoon. He seems almost well again."

"Yes." Sibyl nodded. "His father's going to try to start him to work."

"He seems very delicate," said Mrs. Vertrees. "I shouldn't think he would be able to stand a great deal, either physically or—" She paused and then added, glowing with the sense of her own adroitness—"or mentally."

"Oh, mentally Bibbs is all right," said Sibyl, in an odd voice.

"Entirely?" Mrs. Vertrees asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, entirely."

"But has he *always* been?" This question came with the same anxious eagerness.

"Certainly. He had a long siege of nervous dyspepsia, but he's over it."

"And you think——"

"Bibbs is all right. You needn't wor——" Sibyl choked, and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth. "Good-night, Mrs. Vertrees," she said, hurriedly, as the headlights of an

automobile swung round the corner above, sending a brightening glare toward the edge of the pavement where the two ladies were standing.

"Won't you come in?" urged Mrs. Vertrees, cordially, hearing the sound of a cheerful voice out of the darkness beyond the approaching glare. "Do! There's Mary now, and she——"

But Sibyl was halfway across the street. "No, thanks," she called. "I hope she won't miss her piano!" And she ran into her own house and plunged headlong upon a leather divan in the hall, holding her handkerchief over her mouth.

The noise of her tumultuous entrance was evidently startling in the quiet house, for upon the bang of the door there followed the crash of a decanter, dropped upon the floor of the dining-room at the end of the hall; and, after a rumble of indistinct profanity, Roscoe came forth, holding a dripping napkin in his hand.

"What's your excitement?" he demanded. "What do you find to go into hysterics over? Another death in the family?"

"Oh, it's funny!" she gasped. "Those old frost-bitten people! I guess *they're* getting their come-upance!" Lying prone, she elevated her feet in the air, clapping her heels together repeatedly, in an ecstasy.

"Come through, come through!" said her husband, crossly. "What you been up to?"

"Me?" she cried, dropping her feet, and swinging around to face him. "Nothing. It's them! Those Vertreeses!" She wiped her eyes. "They've had to sell their piano!"

"Well, what of it?"

"That Mrs. Kittersby told me all about 'em a week ago," said Sibyl. "They've been hard up for a long time, and she says as long ago as last winter she knew that girl got a pair of walking-shoes re-soled and patched, because she got it done the same place Mrs. Kittersby's cook had *hers!* And the night of the house-warming I kind of got suspicious, myself. She didn't have one single piece of any kind of real jewellery, and you could see her dress was an old one done over. Men

can't tell those things, and you all made a big fuss over her, but I thought she looked a sight, myself! Of course, *Edith* was crazy to have her, and——"

"Well, well?" he urged, impatiently.

"Well, I'm *telling* you! Mrs. Kittersby says they haven't got a *thing!* Just absolutely *nothing*—and they don't know anywhere to turn! The family's all died out but them, and all the relatives they got are very distant. She says Mrs. Vertrees has always held herself up to be the very cream of the cream because she came from a family named Amberson that's all died out here now; and she says the daughter looks a good deal like one of the Ambersons named Isabel that used to be thought a sort of queen in the old days; but that isn't doing the Vertreeses much good *now!* She says the whole town's been wondering what *would* become of 'em. The girl had plenty chances to marry up to a year or so ago, but she was so indifferent she scared the men off, and the ones that had wanted to went and married other girls. Gracious! they were lucky! Marry *her?* The man that found himself tied up to *that* girl——"

"Terrible funny, terrible funny!" said Roscoe, with sarcasm. "It's so funny I broke a cut-glass decanter and spilled a quart of——"

"Wait!" she begged. "You'll see. I was sitting by the window a little while ago, and I saw a big wagon drive up across the street and some men go into the house. It was too dark to make out much, and for a minute I got the idea they were moving out—the house has been foreclosed on, Mrs. Kittersby says. It seemed funny, too, because I knew that girl was out riding with Bibbs. Well, I thought I'd see, so I slipped over—and it was their *piano!* They'd sold it and were trying to sneak it out after dark, so nobody'd catch on!" Again she gave way to her enjoyment, but resumed, as her husband seemed about to interrupt the narrative, "Wait a minute, can't you? The old lady was superintending, and she gave it all away. I sized her up for one of those old churchy people that tell all kinds of lies except when it comes to so

many words, and then they can't. She might just as well told me outright! Yes, they'd sold it; and I hope they'll pay some of their debts. They owe everybody, and last week a coal-dealer made an awful fuss at the door with Mr. Vertrees. Their cook told our upstairs girl, and she said she didn't know *when* she'd seen any money, herself! Did you ever hear of such a case as that girl in your *life?*"

"What girl? Their cook?"

"That Vertrees girl! Don't you see they looked on our coming up into this neighbourhood as their last chance? They were just going down and out, and here bobs up the green, rich Sheridan family! So they doll the girl up in her old things, made over, and send her out to get a Sheridan —she's *got* to get one! And she just goes in blind; and she tries it on first with *you*. You remember, she just plain *told* you she was going to mash you, and then she found out you were the married one, and turned right square around to Jim and carried him off his feet. Oh, Jim was landed—there's no doubt about *that!* But Jim was lucky; he didn't live to *stay* landed, and it's a good thing for him!" Sibyl's mirth had vanished, and she spoke with virulent rapidity. "Well, she couldn't get you, because you were married, and she couldn't get Jim, because Jim died. And there they were, dead broke! Do you know what she did? Do you know what she's *doing?*"

"No, I don't," said Roscoe, gruffly.

Sibyl's voice rose and culminated in a scream of renewed hilarity. "*Bibbs!* She waited in the graveyard, and drove home with him from *Jim's funeral!* Never spoke to him before! Jim wasn't *cold!*"

She rocked herself back and forth upon the divan. "Bibbs!" she shrieked. "Bibbs! Roscoe, *think* of it! *Bibbs!*"

He stared unsympathetically, but her mirth was unabated for all that. "And yesterday," she continued, between paroxysms—"yesterday she came out of the house—just as he was passing. She must have been looking out—waiting the chance; I saw the old lady watching at the window! And she

got him there last night—to '*play*' to him; the old lady gave that away! And to-day she made him take her out in a machine! And the cream of it is that they didn't even know whether he was *insane* or not—they thought maybe he was, but she went after him just the same! The old lady set herself to pump me about it to-day. *Bibbs!* Oh, my Lord! *Bibbs!*"

But Roscoe looked grim. "So it's funny to you, is it? It sounds kind of pitiful to me. I should think it would to a woman, too."

"Oh, it might," she returned, sobering. "It might, if those people weren't such frozen-faced smart Alecks. If they'd had the decency to come down off the perch a little I probably wouldn't think it was funny, but to see 'em sit up on their pedestal all the time they're eating dirt—well, I think it's funny! That girl sits up as if she was Queen Elizabeth, and expects people to wallow on the ground before her until they get near enough for her to give 'em a good kick with her old patched shoes—oh, she'd do *that*, all right!—and then she powders up and goes out to mash—*Bibbs Sheridan!*"

"Look here," said Roscoe, heavily; "I don't care about that one way or another. If you're through, I got something I want to talk to you about. I was going to, that day just before we heard about Jim."

At this Sibyl stiffened quickly; her eyes became intensely bright. "What is it?"

"Well," he began, frowning, "what I was going to say then——" He broke off, and, becoming conscious that he was still holding the wet napkin in his hand, threw it pettishly into a corner. "I never expected I'd have to say anything like this to anybody I *married;* but I was going to ask you what was the matter between you and Lamhorn."

Sibyl uttered a sharp monosyllable. "Well?"

"I felt the time had come for me to know about it," he went on. "You never told me anything——"

"You never asked," she interposed, curtly.

"Well, we'd got in a way of not talking much," said Roscoe. "It looks to me now as if we'd pretty much lost the run

of each other the way a good many people do. I don't say it wasn't my fault. I was up early and down to work all day, and I'd come home tired at night, and want to go to bed soon as I'd got the paper read—unless there was some good musical show in town. Well, you seemed all right until here lately, the last month or so, I began to see something was wrong. I couldn't help seeing it."

"Wrong?" she said. "What like?"

"You changed; you didn't look the same. You were all strung up and excited and fidgety; you got to looking peakid and run down. Now then, Lamhorn had been going with us a good while, but I noticed that not long ago you got to picking on him about every little thing he did; you got to quarrelling with him when I was there and when I wasn't. I could see you'd been quarrelling whenever I came in and he was here."

"Do you object to that?" asked Sibyl, breathing quickly.

"Yes—when it injures my wife's health!" he returned, with a quick lift of his eyes to hers. "You began to run down just about the time you began falling out with him." He stepped close to her. "See here, Sibyl, I'm going to know what it means."

"Oh, you *are?*" she snapped.

"You're trembling," he said, gravely.

"Yes. I'm angry enough to do more than tremble, you'll find. Go on!"

"That was all I was going to say the other day," he said. "I was going to ask you——"

"Yes, that was all you were going to say *the other day*. Yes. What else have you to say to-night?"

"To-night," he replied, with grim swiftness, "I want to know why you keep telephoning him you want to see him since he stopped coming here."

She made a long, low sound of comprehension before she said, "And what else did Edith want you to ask me?"

"I want to know what you say over the telephone to Lamhorn," he said, fiercely.

"Is that all Edith told you to ask me? You saw her when

you stopped in there on your way home this evening, didn't you? Didn't she tell you then what I said over the telephone to Mr. Lamhorn?"

"No, she didn't!" he vociferated, his voice growing louder. "She said, 'You tell your wife to stop telephoning Robert Lamhorn to come and see her, because he isn't going to do it!' That's what she said! And I want to know what it means. I intend——"

A maid appeared at the lower end of the hall. "Dinner is ready," she said, and, giving the troubled pair one glance, went demurely into the dining-room. Roscoe disregarded the interruption.

"I intend to know exactly what has been going on," he declared. "I mean to know just what——"

Sibyl jumped up, almost touching him, standing face to face with him.

"Oh, you *do!*" she cried, shrilly. "You mean to know just what's what, do you? You listen to your sister insinuating ugly things about your wife, and then you come home making a scene before the servants and humiliating me in their presence! Do you suppose that Irish girl didn't hear every word you said? You go in there and eat your dinner alone! Go on! Go and eat your dinner alone—because *I* won't eat with you!"

And she broke away from the detaining grasp he sought to fasten upon her, and dashed up the stairway, panting. He heard the door of her room slam overhead, and the sharp click of the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XVII

AT SEVEN o'clock on the last morning of that month, Sheridan, passing through the upper hall on his way to descend the stairs for breakfast, found a couple of scribbled sheets of note-paper lying on the floor. A window had been open in Bibbs's room the evening before; he had left his note-book on the sill—and the sheets were loose. The door was open, and when Bibbs came in and closed it, he did not notice that the two sheets had blown out into the hall. Sheridan recognized the handwriting and put the sheets in his coat pocket, intending to give them to George or Jackson for return to the owner, but he forgot and carried them downtown with him. At noon he found himself alone in his office, and, having a little leisure, remembered the bits of manuscript, took them out, and glanced at them. A glance was enough to reveal that they were not epistolary. Sheridan would not have read a "private letter" that came into his possession in that way, though in a "matter of business" he might have felt it his duty to take advantage of an opportunity afforded in any manner whatsoever. Having satisfied himself that Bibbs's scribblings were only a sample of the kind of writing his son preferred to the machine-shop, he decided, innocently enough, that he would be justified in reading them.

It appears that a lady will nod pleasantly upon some windy generalization of a companion, and will wear the most agreeable expression of accepting it as the law, and then—days afterward, when the thing is a mummy to its promulgator—she will inquire out of a clear sky: "*Why* did you say that the people downtown have nothing in life that a chicken hasn't? What did you mean?" And she may say it in a manner that makes a sensible reply very difficult—you will be so full of wonder that she remembered so seriously.

Yet, what does the rooster lack? He has food and shelter; he is warm in winter; his wives raise not one fine family for him, but dozens. He has a clear sky over him; he breathes sweet air; he walks in his April orchard under a roof of flowers. He must die, violently perhaps, but quickly. Is Midas's cancer a better way? The rooster's wives and children must die. Are those of Midas immortal? His life is shorter than the life of Midas, but Midas's life is only a sixth as long as that of the Galapagos tortoise.

The worthy money-worker takes his vacation so that he may refresh himself anew for the hard work of getting nothing that the rooster doesn't get. The office-building has an elevator, the rooster flies up to the bough. Midas has a machine to take him to his work; the rooster finds his worm underfoot. The "business man" feels a pressure sometimes, without knowing why, and sits late at wine after the day's labour; next morning he curses his head because it interferes with the work—he swears never to relieve that pressure again. The rooster has no pressure and no wine; this difference is in his favour.

The rooster is a dependent; he depends upon the farmer and the weather. Midas is a dependent; he depends upon the farmer and the weather. The rooster thinks only of the moment; Midas provides for to-morrow. What does he provide for to-morrow? Nothing that the rooster will not have without providing.

The rooster and the prosperous worker: they are born, they grub, they love; they grub and love grubbing; they grub and they die. Neither knows beauty; neither knows knowledge. And after all, when Midas dies and rooster dies, there is one thing Midas has had and rooster has not. Midas has had the excitement of accumulating what he has grubbed, and that has been his life and his love and his god. He cannot take that god with him when he dies. I wonder if the worthy gods are those we can take with us.

Midas must teach all to be as Midas; the young must be raised in his religion——

The manuscript ended there, and Sheridan was not anxious for more. He crumpled the sheets into a ball, depositing it (with viguor) in a waste-basket beside him; then, rising, he consulted a *Cyclopedia of Names*, which a book-agent had somehow sold to him years before; a volume now first put to use for the location of "Midas." Having read the

legend, Sheridan walked up and down the spacious office, exhaling the breath of contempt. "Dam' fool!" he mumbled. But this was no new thought, nor was the contrariness of Bibbs's notes a surprise to him; and presently he dismissed the matter from his mind.

He felt very lonely, and this was, daily, his hardest hour. For a long time he and Jim had lunched together habitually. Roscoe preferred a club luncheon, but Jim and his father almost always went to a small restaurant near the Sheridan Building, where they spent twenty minutes in the consumption of food, and twenty in talk, with cigars. Jim came for his father every day, at five minutes after twelve, and Sheridan was again in his office at five minutes before one. But now that Jim no longer came, Sheridan remained alone in his office; he had not gone out to lunch since Jim's death, nor did he have anything sent to him—he fasted until evening.

It was the time he missed Jim personally the most—the voice and eyes and handshake, all brisk and alert, all business-like. But these things were not the keenest in Sheridan's grief; his sense of loss went far deeper. Roscoe was dependable, a steady old wheel-horse, and that was a great comfort; but it was in Jim that Sheridan had most happily perceived his own likeness. Jim was the one who would have been surest to keep the great property growing greater, year by year. Sheridan had fallen asleep, night after night, picturing what the growth would be under Jim. He had believed that Jim was absolutely certain to be one of the biggest men in the country. Well, it was all up to Roscoe now!

That reminded him of a question he had in mind to ask Roscoe. It was a question Sheridan considered of no present importance, but his wife had suggested it—though vaguely—and he had meant to speak to Roscoe about it. However, Roscoe had not come into his father's office for several days, and when Sheridan had seen his son at home there had been no opportunity.

He waited until the greater part of his day's work was over, toward four o'clock, and then went down to Roscoe's office,

which was on a lower floor. He found several men waiting for business interviews in an outer room of the series Roscoe occupied; and he supposed that he would find his son busy with others, and that his question would have to be postponed, but when he entered the door marked "R. C. Sheridan. Private," Roscoe was there alone.

He was sitting with his back to the door, his feet on a window-sill, and he did not turn as his father opened the door.

"Some pretty good men out there waitin' to see you, my boy," said Sheridan. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Roscoe answered, indistinctly, not moving.

"Well, I guess that's all right, too. I let 'em wait sometimes myself! I just wanted to ask you a question, but I expect it'll keep, if you're workin' something out in your mind."

Roscoe made no reply; and his father, who had turned to the door, paused with his hand on the knob, staring curiously at the motionless figure in the chair. Usually the son seemed pleased and eager when he came to the office. "You're all right, ain't you?" said Sheridan. "Not sick, are you?"

"No."

Sheridan was puzzled; then, abruptly, he decided to ask his question. "I wanted to talk to you about that young Lamhorn," he said. "I guess your mother thinks he's comin' to see Edith pretty often, and you known him longer 'n any of us, so——"

"I won't," said Roscoe, thickly—"I won't say a dam' thing about him!"

Sheridan uttered an exclamation and walked quickly to a position near the window where he could see his son's face. Roscoe's eyes were bloodshot and vacuous; his hair was disordered, his mouth was distorted, and he was deathly pale. The father stood aghast.

"By George!" he muttered. "*Roscoe!*"

"My name," said Roscoe. "Can' help that."

"*Roscoe!*" Blank astonishment was Sheridan's first sensation. Probably nothing in the world could have more amazed

him than to find Roscoe—the steady old wheel-horse—in this condition. "How'd you *get* this way?" he demanded. "You caught cold and took too much for it?"

For reply Roscoe laughed hoarsely. "Yeuh! Cold! I been drinkin' all time, lately. Firs' you notice it?"

"By George!" cried Sheridan. "I *thought* I'd smelt it on you a good deal lately, but I wouldn't 'a' believed you'd take more'n was good for you. Boh! To see you like a common hog!"

Roscoe chuckled and threw out his right arm in a meaningless gesture. "Hog!" he repeated, chuckling.

"Yes, a hog!" said Sheridan, angrily. "In business hours! I don't object to anybody's takin' a drink if he wants to, out o' business hours; nor, if a man keeps his work right up to the scratch, I wouldn't be the one to baste him if he got good an' drunk once in two, three years, maybe. It ain't *my* way. I let it alone, but I never believed in forcin' my way on a grown-up son in moral matters. I guess I was wrong! You think them men out there are waitin' to talk business with a drunkard? You think you can come to your office and do business drunk? By George! I wonder how often this has been happening and me not on to it! I'll have a look over your books to-morrow, and I'll——"

Roscoe stumbled to his feet, laughing wildly, and stood swaying, contriving to hold himself in position by clutching the back of the heavy chair in which he had been sitting.

"Hoo-hoorah!" he cried. " 'S my principles, too. Be drunkard all you want to—outside business hours. Don' for Gossake le'n'thing innerfere business hours! Business! Thassit! You're right, father. Drink! Die! L'everything go to hell, but *don'* let innerfere business!"

Sheridan had seized the telephone upon Roscoe's desk, and was calling his own office, overhead. "Abercrombie? Come down to my son Roscoe's suite and get rid of some gentlemen that are waitin' there to see him in room two-fourteen. There's Maples and Schirmer and a couple o' fellows on the Kinsey business. Tell 'em something's come up

I have to go over with Roscoe, and tell 'em to come back day after to-morrow at two. You needn't come in to let me know they're gone; we don't want to be disturbed. Tell Pauley to call my house and send Claus down here with a closed car. We may have to go out. Tell him to hustle, and call me at Roscoe's room as soon as the car gets here. 'T's all!"

Roscoe had laughed bitterly throughout this monologue. "Drunk in business hours! Thass awf'l! Mus'n' do such thing! Mus'n' get drunk, mus'n' gamble, mus'n' kill 'nybody—not in business hours! All right any other time. Kill 'nybody you want to—'s long 'tain't in business hours! Fine! Mus'n' have any trouble 't 'll innerfere business. Keep your trouble 't home. Don' bring it to th' office. Might innerfere business. Have funerals on Sunday—might innerfere business! Don' let your wife innerfere business! Keep all, all, *all* your trouble an' your meanness, an' your trad—your tradegy—keep 'em *all* for home use! If you got die, go on die 't home—don' die round th' office! Might innerfere business!"

Sheridan picked up a newspaper from Roscoe's desk, and sat down with his back to his son, affecting to read. Roscoe seemed to be unaware of his father's significant posture.

"You know wh' *I* think?" he went on. "I think Bibbs only one the fam'ly any 'telligence at all. Won' work, an' di'n' get married. Jim worked, an' he got killed. I worked, an' I got married. Look at me! Jus' look at me, I ask you. Fine 'dustriss young business man. Look whass happen' to me! Fine!" He lifted his hand from the sustaining chair in a deplorable gesture, and, immediately losing his balance, fell across the chair and caromed to the floor with a crash, remaining prostrate for several minutes, during which Sheridan did not relax his apparent attention to the newspaper. He did not even look around at the sound of Roscoe's fall.

Roscoe slowly climbed to an upright position, pulling himself up by holding to the chair. He was slightly sobered outwardly, having progressed in the prostrate interval to a state of befuddlement less volatile. He rubbed his dazed eyes with the back of his left hand.

"What—what you ask me while ago?" he said.

"Nothin'."

"Yes, you did. What—what was it?"

"Nothin'. You better sit down."

"You ask' me what I thought about Lamhorn. You did ask me that. Well, I won't tell you. I won't say dam' word 'bout him!"

The telephone-bell tinkled. Sheridan placed the receiver to his ear and said, "Right down." Then he got Roscoe's coat and hat from a closet and brought them to his son. "Get into this coat," he said. "You're goin' home."

"All ri'," Roscoe murmured, obediently.

They went out into the main hall by a side door, not passing through the outer office; and Sheridan waited for an empty elevator, stopped it, and told the operator to take on no more passengers until they reached the ground floor. Roscoe walked out of the building and got into the automobile without lurching, and twenty minutes later walked into his own house in the same manner, neither he nor his father having spoken a word in the interval.

Sheridan did not go in with him; he went home, and to his own room without meeting any of his family. But as he passed Bibbs's door he heard from within the sound of a cheerful young voice humming jubilant fragments of song:

> "*Who* looks a mustang in the eye? . . .
> With a leap from the ground
> To the saddle in a bound.
> And away—and away!
> Hi-yay!"

It was the first time in Sheridan's life that he had ever detected any musical symptom whatever in Bibbs—he had never even heard him whistle—and it seemed the last touch of irony that the useless fool should be merry to-day.

To Sheridan it was Tom o' Bedlam singing while the house burned; and he did not tarry to enjoy the melody, but went into his own room and locked the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE EMERGED only upon a second summons to dinner, two hours later, and came to the table so white and silent that his wife made her anxiety manifest and was but partially reassured by his explanation that his lunch had "disagreed" with him a little.

Presently, however, he spoke effectively. Bibbs, whose appetite had become hearty, was helping himself to a second breast of capon from white-jacket's salver. "Here's another difference between Midas and chicken," Sheridan remarked, grimly. "Midas can eat rooster, but rooster can't eat Midas. I reckon you overlooked that. Midas looks to me like he had the advantage there."

Bibbs retained enough presence of mind to transfer the capon breast to his plate without dropping it and to respond, "Yes—he crows over it."

Having returned his antagonist's fire in this fashion, he blushed—for he could blush distinctly now—and his mother looked upon him with pleasure, though the reference to Midas and roosters was of course jargon to her. "Did you ever see anybody improve the way that child has!" she exclaimed. "I declare, Bibbs, sometimes lately you look right handsome!"

"He's got to be such a gadabout," Edith giggled.

"I found something of his on the floor upstairs this morning, before anybody was up," said Sheridan. "I reckon if people lose things in this house and expect to get 'em back, they better get up as soon as I do."

"What was it he lost?" asked Edith.

"He knows!" her father returned. "Seems to me like I forgot to bring it home with me. I looked it over—thought probably it was something pretty important, belongin' to a busy

man like him." He affected to search his pockets. "What *did* I do with it, now? Oh, yes! Seems to me like I remember leavin' it down at the office—in the waste-basket."

"Good place for it," Bibbs murmured, still red.

Sheridan gave him a grin. "Perhaps pretty soon you'll be gettin' up early enough to find things before *I* do!"

It was a threat, and Bibbs repeated the substance of it, later in the evening, to Mary Vertrees—they had come to know each other that well.

"My time's here at last," he said, as they sat together in the melancholy gas-light of the room that had been denuded of its piano. This removal had left an emptiness so distressing to Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees that neither of them had crossed the threshold since the dark day; but the gas-light, though from a single jet, shed no melancholy upon Bibbs, nor could any room seem bare that knew the glowing presence of Mary. He spoke lightly, not sadly.

"Yes, it's come. I've shirked and put off, but I can't shirk and put off any longer. It's really my part to go to him—at least it would save my face. He means what he says, and the time's come to serve my sentence. Hard labour for life, I think."

Mary shook her head. "I don't think so. He's too kind."

"You think my father's *kind?*" And Bibbs stared at her.

"Yes. I'm sure of it. I've felt that he has a great, brave heart. It's only that he has to be kind in his own way—because he can't understand any other way."

"Ah yes," said Bibbs. "If that's what you mean by 'kind'!"

She looked at him gravely, earnest concern in her friendly eyes. "It's going to be pretty hard for you, isn't it?"

"Oh—self-pity!" he returned, smiling. "This has been just the last flicker of revolt. Nobody minds work if he likes the kind of work. There'd be no loafers in the world if each man found the thing that he could do best; but the only work I happen to want to do is useless—so I have to give it up. To-morrow I'll be a day-labourer."

"What is it like—exactly?"

"I get up at six," he said. "I have a lunch-basket to carry with me, which is aristocratic and no advantage. The other workmen have tin buckets, and tin buckets are better. I leave the house at six-thirty, and I'm at work in my overalls at seven. I have an hour off at noon, and work again from one till five."

"But the work itself?"

"It wasn't muscularly exhausting—not at all. They couldn't give me a heavier job because I wasn't good enough."

"But what will you do? I want to know."

"When I left," said Bibbs, "I was 'on' what they call over there a 'clipping-machine,' in one of the 'by-products' departments, and that's what I'll be sent back to."

"But what is it?" she insisted.

Bibbs explained. "It's very simple and very easy. I feed long strips of zinc into a pair of steel jaws, and the jaws bite the zinc into little circles. All I have to do is to see that the strip goes into the jaws at a certain angle—and yet I was a very bad hand at it."

He had kept his voice cheerful as he spoke, but he had grown a shade paler, and there was a latent anguish deep in his eyes. He may have known it and wished her not to see it, for he turned away.

"You do that all day long?" she asked, and as he nodded, "It seems incredible!" she exclaimed. "*You* feeding a strip of zinc into a machine nine hours a day! No wonder——" She broke off, and then, after a keen glance at his face, she said: "I should think you *would* have been a 'bad hand at it'!"

He laughed ruefully. "I think it's the noise, though I'm ashamed to say it. You see, it's a very powerful machine, and there's a sort of rhythmical crashing—a crash every time the jaws bite off a circle."

"How often is that?"

"The thing should make about sixty-eight disks a minute —a little more than one a second."

"And you're close to it?"

"Oh, the workman has to sit in its lap," he said, turning to her more gaily. "The others don't mind. You see, it's something wrong with me. I have an idiotic way of flinching from the confounded thing—I flinch and duck a little every time the crash comes, and I couldn't get over it. I was a treat to the other workmen in that room; they'll be glad to see me back. They used to laugh at me all day long."

Mary's gaze was averted from Bibbs now; she sat with her elbow resting on the arm of the chair, her lifted hand pressed against her cheek. She was staring at the wall, and her eyes had a burning brightness in them.

"It doesn't seem possible anyone could do that to you," she said, in a low voice. "No. He's not kind. He ought to be proud to help you to the leisure to write books; it should be his greatest privilege to have them published for you——"

"Can't you *see* him?" Bibbs interrupted, a faint ripple of hilarity in his voice. "If he could understand what you're saying—and if you can imagine his taking such a notion, he'd have had R. T. Bloss put up posters all over the country: 'Read B. Sheridan. Read the Poet with a Punch!' No. It's just as well he never got the—— But what's the use? I've never written anything worth printing, and I never shall."

"You could!" she said.

"That's because you've never seen the poor little things I've tried to do."

"You wouldn't let me, but I *know* you could! Ah, it's a pity!"

"It isn't," said Bibbs, honestly. "I never could—but you're the kindest lady in this world, Miss Vertrees."

She gave him a flashing glance, and it was as kind as he said she was. "That sounds wrong," she said, impulsively. "I mean 'Miss Vertrees.' I've thought of you by your first name ever since I met you. Wouldn't you rather call me 'Mary'?"

Bibbs was dazzled; he drew a long, deep breath and did not speak.

"Wouldn't you?" she asked, without a trace of coquetry.

"If I *can!*" he said, in a low voice.

"Ah, that's very pretty!" she laughed. "You're such an honest person, it's pleasant to have you gallant sometimes, by way of variety." She became grave again immediately. "I hear myself laughing as if it were someone else. It sounds like laughter on the eve of a great calamity." She got up restlessly, crossed the room and leaned against the wall, facing him. "You've *got* to go back to that place?"

He nodded.

"And the other time you did it——"

"Just over it," said Bibbs. "Two years. But I don't mind the prospect of a repetition so much as——"

"So much as what?" she prompted, as he stopped.

Bibbs looked up at her shyly. "I want to say it, but—but I come to a dead balk, when I try. I——"

"Go on. Say it, whatever it is," she bade him. "You wouldn't know how to say anything I shouldn't like."

"I doubt if you'd either like or dislike what I want to say," he returned, moving uncomfortably in his chair and looking at his feet—he seemed to feel awkward, thoroughly. "You see, all my life—until I met you—if I ever felt like saying anything, I wrote it instead. Saying things is a new trick for me, and this—well, it's just this: I used to feel as if I hadn't ever had any sort of a life at all. I'd never been of use to anything or anybody, and I'd never had anything, myself, except a kind of haphazard thinking. But now it's different—I'm still of no use to anybody, and I don't see any prospect of being useful, but I have had something for myself. I've had a beautiful and happy experience, and it makes my life seem to be—I mean I'm glad I've lived it! That's all; it's your letting me be near you sometimes, as you have, this strange, beautiful, happy little while!"

He did not once look up, and reached silence, at the end of what he had to say, with his eyes still awkwardly regarding his feet. She did not speak, but a soft rustling of her garments let him know that she had gone back to her chair

again. The house was still; the shabby old room was so quiet that the sound of a creaking in the wall seemed sharp and loud.

And yet, when Mary spoke at last, her voice was barely audible. "If you think it has been—happy—to be friends with me—you'd want to—to make it last."

"Yes," said Bibbs, as faintly.

"You'd want to go on being my friend as long as we live, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," he gulped.

"But you make that kind of speech to me because you think it's over."

He tried to evade her. "Oh, a day-labourer can't come in his overalls——"

"No," she interrupted, with a sudden sharpness. "You said what you did because you think the shop's going to kill you."

"No, no!"

"Yes, you do think that!" She rose to her feet again and came and stood before him. "Or you think it's going to send you back to the sanitarium. Don't deny it, Bibbs. There! See how easily I call you that! You see I'm a friend, or I couldn't do it. Well, if you meant what you said—and you did mean it, I know it!—you're not going to go back to the sanitarium. The shop sha'n't hurt you. It sha'n't!"

And now Bibbs looked up. She stood before him, straight and tall, splendid in generous strength, her eyes shining and wet.

"If I mean *that* much to you," she cried, "they can't harm you! Go back to the shop—but come to me when your day's work is done. Let the machines crash their sixty-eight times a minute, but remember each crash that deafens you is that much nearer the evening and me!"

He stumbled to his feet. "You say——" he gasped.

"Every evening, dear Bibbs!"

He could only stare, bewildered.

"*Every* evening. I want you. They sha'n't hurt you again!"

And she held out her hand to him; it was strong and warm in his tremulous clasp. "If I could, I'd go and feed the strips of zinc to the machine with you," she said. "But all day long I'll send my thoughts to you. You must keep remembering that your friend stands beside you. And when the work is done—won't the night make up for the day?"

Light seemed to glow from her; he was blinded by that radiance of kindness. But all he could say was, huskily, "To think you're there—with me—standing beside the old zinc-eater——"

And they laughed and looked at each other, and at last Bibbs found what it meant not to be alone in the world. He had a friend.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN he came into the New House, a few minutes later, he found his father sitting alone by the library fire. Bibbs went in and stood before him.

"I'm cured, father," he said. "When do I go back to the shop? I'm ready."

The desolate and grim old man did not relax. "I was sittin' up to give you a last chance to say something like that. I reckon it's about time! I just wanted to see if you'd have manhood enough not to make me take you over there by the collar. Last night I made up my mind I'd give you just one more day. Well, you got to it before I did—pretty close to the eleventh hour! All right. Start in to-morrow. It's the first o' the month. Think you can get up in time?"

"Six o'clock," Bibbs responded, briskly. "And I want to tell you—I'm going in a 'cheerful spirit.' As you said, I'll go and I'll 'like it'!"

"That's *your* lookout!" his father grunted. "They'll put you back on the clippin'-machine. You get nine dollars a week."

"More than I'm worth, too," said Bibbs, cheerily. "That reminds me, I didn't mean *you* by 'Midas' in that nonsense I'd been writing. I meant——"

"Makes a hell of a lot o' difference what you meant!"

"I just wanted you to know. Good-night, father."

"G'night!"

The sound of the young man's footsteps ascending the stairs became inaudible, and the house was quiet. But presently, as Sheridan sat staring angrily at the fire, the shuffling of a pair of slippers could be heard descending, and Mrs. Sheridan made her appearance, her oblique expression and the state of her toilette being those of a person who, after

trying unsuccessfully to sleep on one side, has got up to look for burglars.

"Papa!" she exclaimed, drowsily. "Why'n't you go to bed? It must be goin' on 'leven o'clock!"

She yawned, and seated herself near him, stretching out her hands to the fire. "What's the matter?" she asked, sleep and anxiety striving sluggishly with each other in her voice. "I knew you were worried all dinner-time. You got something new on your mind besides Jim's bein' taken away like he was. What's worryin' you now, papa?"

"Nothin'."

She jeered feebly. "N' tell *me* that! You sat up to see Bibbs, didn't you?"

"He starts in at the shop again to-morrow morning," said Sheridan.

"Just the same as he did before?"

"Just pre-*cisely!*"

"How—how long you goin' to keep him at it, papa?" she asked, timidly.

"Until he *knows* something!" The unhappy man struck his palms together, then got to his feet and began to pace the room, as was his wont when he talked. "He'll go back to the machine he couldn't learn to tend properly in the six months he was there, and he'll stick to it till he *does* learn it! Do you suppose that lummix ever asked himself *why* I want him to learn it? No! And I ain't a-goin' to tell him, either! When he went there I had 'em set him on the simplest machine we got—and he stuck there! How much prospect would there be of his learnin' to run the whole business if he can't run the easiest machine in it? I sent him there to make him *thorough*. And what happened? He didn't *like* it! That boy's whole life, there's been a settin' up o' something mulish that's against everything I want him to do. I don't know what it is, but it's got to be worked out of him. Now, labour ain't any more a simple question than what it was when we were young. My idea is that, outside o' union troubles, the man that can manage workin'-men is the man that's been one himself.

Well, I set Bibbs to learn the men and to learn the business, and *he* set himself to balk on the first job! That's what he did, and the balk's lasted close on to three years. If he balks again I'm just done with him! Sometimes I feel like I was pretty near done with everything, anyhow!"

"I knew there was something else," said Mrs. Sheridan, blinking over a yawn. "You better let it go till to-morrow and get to bed now—'less you'll tell me?"

"Suppose something happened to Roscoe," he said. "*Then* what'd I have to look forward to? *Then* what could I depend on to hold things together? A lummix! A lummix that hasn't learned how to push a strip o' zinc along a groove!"

"Roscoe?" she yawned. "You needn't worry about Roscoe, papa. He's the strongest child we had. I never did know anybody keep better health than he does. I don't believe he's even had a cold in five years. You better go up to bed, papa."

"Suppose something *dia* happen to him, though. You don't know what it means, keepin' property together these days—just keepin' it *alive*, let alone makin' it grow the way *I* do. I've seen too many estates hacked away in chunks, big and little. I tell you when a man dies the wolves come out o' the woods, pack after pack, to see what they can tear off for themselves; and if that dead man's chuldern ain't on the job, night and day, everything he built 'll get carried off. Carried off? I've seen a big fortune behave like an ash-barrel in a cyclone—there wasn't even a dust-heap left to tell where it stood! I've seen it, time and time again. My Lord! when I think o' such things comin' to *me!* It don't seem like I deserved it—no man ever tried harder to raise his boys right than I have. I planned and planned and planned how to bring 'em up to be guards to drive the wolves off, and how to be builders to build, and build bigger. I tell you this business life is no fool's job nowadays—a man's got to have eyes in the back of his head. You hear talk, sometimes, 'd made you think the millennium had come—but right the next breath you'll hear somebody hollerin' about 'the great unrest.'

You *bet* there's a 'great unrest'! There ain't any man alive smart enough to see what it's goin' to do to us in the end, nor what day it's got set to bust loose, but it's frothin' and bubblin' in the boiler. This country's been fillin' up with it from all over the world for a good many years, and the old camp-meetin' days are dead and done with. Church ain't what it used to be. Nothin's what it used to be—everything's turned up from the bottom, and the growth is so big the roots stick out in the air. There's an awful ruction goin' on, and you got to keep hoppin' if you're goin' to keep your balance on the top of it. And the schemers! They run like bugs on the bottom of a board—after any piece o' money they hear is loose. Fool schemes and crooked schemes; the fool ones are the most and the worst! You got to *fight* to keep your money after you've made it. And the woods are full o' mighty industrious men that's got only one motto: 'Get the other fellow's money before he gets yours!' And when a man's built as *I* have, when he's built good and strong, and made things grow and prosper—*those* are the fellows that lay for the chance to slide in and sneak the benefit of it and put their names to it! And what's the use my havin' ever been born, if such a thing as that is goin' to happen? What's the use my havin' worked my life and soul into my business, if it's all goin' to be dispersed and scattered soon as I'm in the ground?"

He strode up and down the long room, gesticulating—little regarding the troubled and drowsy figure by the fireside. His throat rumbled thunderously; the words came with stormy bitterness. "You think this is a time for young men to be lyin' on beds of ease? I tell you there never was such a time before; there never was such opportunity. The sluggard is despoiled while he sleeps—yes, by George! If a man lays down they'll eat him before he wakes!—but the live man can build straight up till he touches the sky! This is the business man's day; it used to be the soldier's day and the statesman's day, but this is *ours!* And it ain't a Sunday to go fishin'—it's turmoil! turmoil!—and you got to go out and live it and breathe it and *make* it yourself, or you'll only

be a dead man walkin' around dreamin' you're alive. And that's what my son Bibbs has been doin' all his life, and what he'd rather do now than go out and do his part by me. And if anything happens to Roscoe——"

"Oh, do stop worryin' over such nonsense," Mrs. Sheridan interrupted, irritated into sharp wakefulness for the moment. "There isn't anything goin' to happen to Roscoe, and you're just tormentin' yourself about nothin'. Aren't you *ever* goin' to bed?"

Sheridan halted. "All right, mamma," he said, with a vast sigh. "Let's go up." And he snapped off the electric light, leaving only the rosy glow of the fire.

"Did you speak to Roscoe?" she yawned, rising lopsidedly in her drowsiness. "Did you mention about what I told you the other evening?"

"No. I will to-morrow."

But Roscoe did not come downtown the next day, nor the next; nor did Sheridan see fit to enter his son's house. He waited. Then, on the fourth day of the month, Roscoe walked into his father's office at nine in the morning, when Sheridan happened to be alone.

"They told me downstairs you'd left word you wanted to see me."

"Sit down," said Sheridan, rising.

Roscoe sat. His father walked close to him, sniffed suspiciously, and then walked away, smiling bitterly. "Boh!" he exclaimed. "Still at it!"

"Yes," said Roscoe. "I've had a couple of drinks this morning. What about it?"

"I reckon I better adopt some decent young man," his father returned. "I'd bring Bibbs up here and put him in your place if he was fit. I would!"

"Better do it," Roscoe assented, sullenly.

"When 'd you begin this thing?"

"I always did drink a little. Ever since I grew up, that is."

"Leave that talk out! You know what I mean."

"Well, I don't know as I ever had too much in office hours —until the other day."

Sheridan began cutting. "It's a lie. I've had Ray Wills up from your office. He didn't want to give you away, but I put the hooks into him, and he came through. You were drunk twice before and couldn't work. You been leavin' your office for drinks every few hours for the last three weeks. I been over your books. Your office is way behind. You haven't done any work, to count, in a month."

"All right," said Roscoe, drooping under the torture. "It's all true."

"What you goin' to do about it?"

Roscoe's head was sunk between his shoulders. "I can't stand very much talk about it, father," he said, pleadingly.

"No!" Sheridan cried. "Neither can I! What do you think it means to *me?*" He dropped into the chair at his big desk, groaning. "I can't stand to talk about it any more'n you can to listen, but I'm goin' to find out what's the matter with you, and I'm goin' to straighten you out!"

Roscoe shook his head helplessly.

"You can't straighten me out."

"See here!" said Sheridan. "Can you go back to your office and stay sober to-day, while I get my work done, or will I have to hire a couple o' huskies to follow you around and knock the whiskey out o' your hand if they see you tryin' to take it?"

"You needn't worry about that," said Roscoe, looking up with a faint resentment. "I'm not drinking because I've got a thirst."

"Well, what have you got?"

"Nothing. Nothing you can do anything about. Nothing, I tell you."

"We'll see about that!" said Sheridan, harshly. "Now I can't fool with you to-day, and you get up out o' that chair and get out o' my office. You bring your wife to dinner to-morrow. You didn't come last Sunday—but you come to-morrow. I'll talk this out with you when the women-folks

are workin' the phonograph, after dinner. Can you keep sober till then? You better be sure, because I'm goin' to send Abercrombie down to your office every little while, and he'll let me know."

Roscoe paused at the door. "You told Abercrombie about it?" he asked.

"*Told* him!" And Sheridan laughed hideously. "Do you suppose there's an elevator-boy in the whole dam' building that ain't on to you?"

Roscoe settled his hat down over his eyes and went out.

CHAPTER XX

"*Who* looks a mustang in the eye?
Changety, chang, chang! Bash! Crash! *Bang!*"

SO SANG Bibbs, his musical gaieties inaudible to his fellow-workmen because of the noise of the machinery. He had discovered long ago that the uproar was rhythmical, and it had been intolerable; but now, on the afternoon of the fourth day of his return, he was accompanying the swing and clash of the metals with jubilant vaquero fragments, mingling improvisations of his own among them, and mocking the zinc-eater's crash with vocal imitations:

"Fearless and bold,
Chang! Bash! Behold!
With a leap from the ground
To the saddle in a bound,
And away—and away!
Hi-*yay!*
Who looks a chang, chang, bash, crash, bang!
Who cares a dash how you bash and you crash?
Night's on the way
Each time I say,
Hi-*yay!*
Crash, chang! Bash, chang! Chang, bang, *bang!*

The long room was ceaselessly thundering with metallic sound; the air was thick with the smell of oil; the floor trembled perpetually; everything was implacably in motion—nowhere was there a rest for the dizzied eye. The first time he had entered the place Bibbs had become dizzy instantly, and six months of it had only added increasing nausea to faintness. But he felt neither now. "*All day long I'll send my*

thoughts to you. You must keep remembering that your friend stands beside you." He saw her there beside him, and the greasy, roaring place became suffused with radiance. The poet was happy in his machine-shop; he was still a poet there. And he fed his old zinc-eater, and sang:

"Away—and away!
Hi-*yay!*
Crash, bash, crash, bash, *chang!*
Wild are his eyes,
Fiercely he dies!
Hi-*yay!*
Crash, bash, bang! Bash, *chang!*
Ready to fling
Our gloves in the ring——"

He was unaware of a sensation that passed along the lines of workmen. Their great master had come among them, and they grinned to see him standing with Dr. Gurney behind the unconscious Bibbs. Sheridan nodded to those nearest him—he had personal acquaintance with nearly all of them—but he kept his attention upon his son. Bibbs worked steadily, never turning from his machine. Now and then he varied his musical programme with remarks addressed to the zinc-eater.

"Go on, you old crash-basher! Chew it up! It's good for you, if you don't try to bolt your vittles. Fletcherize, you pig! That's right—*you'll* never get a lump in your gizzard. Want some more? Here's a nice, shiny one."

The words were indistinguishable, but Sheridan inclined his head to Gurney's ear and shouted fiercely: "Talkin' to himself! By George!"

Gurney laughed reassuringly, and shook his head.

Bibbs returned to song:

"Chang! Chang, bash, chang! It's *I!*
Who looks a mustang in the eye?
Fearless and bo——"

His father grasped him by the arm. "Here!" he shouted. "Let *me* show you how to run a strip through there. The foreman says you're some better'n you used to be, but that's no way to handle—— Get out the way and let me show you once."

"Better be careful," Bibbs warned him, stepping to one side.

"Careful? Boh!" Sheridan seized a strip of zinc from the box. "What you talkin' to yourself about? Tryin' to make yourself think you're so abused you're goin' wrong in the head?"

"'Abused'? No!" shouted Bibbs. "I was *singing*—because I 'like it'! I told you I'd come back and 'like it.'"

Sheridan may not have understood. At all events, he made no reply, but began to run the strip of zinc through the machine. He did it awkwardly—and with bad results.

"Here!" he shouted. "This is the way. Watch how *I* do it. There's nothin' to it, if you put your mind on it." By his own showing then his mind was not upon it. He continued to talk. "All you got to look out for is to keep it pressed over to——"

"Don't run your hand up with it," Bibbs vociferated, leaning toward him.

"Run nothin'! You *got* to——"

"Look out!" shouted Bibbs and Gurney together, and they both sprang forward. But Sheridan's right hand had followed the strip too far, and the zinc-eater had bitten off the tips of the first and second fingers. He swore vehemently, and wrung his hand, sending a shower of red drops over himself and Bibbs, but Gurney grasped his wrist, and said, sharply:

"Come out of here. Come over to the lavatory in the office. Bibbs, fetch my bag. It's in my machine, outside."

And when Bibbs brought the bag to the washroom he found the doctor still grasping Sheridan's wrist, holding the injured hand over a basin. Sheridan had lost colour and temper, too. He glared over his shoulder at his son as the latter handed the bag to Gurney.

"You go on back to your work," he said. "I've had worse snips than that from a pencil-sharpener."

"Oh no, you haven't!" said Gurney.

"I have, too!" Sheridan retorted, angrily. "Bibbs, you go on back to your work. There's no reason to stand around here watchin' old Doc Gurney tryin' to keep himself awake workin' on a scratch that only needs a little court-plaster. I slipped, or it wouldn't happened. You get back on your job."

"All right," said Bibbs.

"*Here!*" Sheridan bellowed, as his son was passing out of the door. "You watch out when you're runnin' that machine! You hear what I say? I slipped, or I wouldn't got scratched, but you—*you're* liable to get your whole hand cut off! You keep your eyes open!"

"Yes, sir." And Bibbs returned to the zinc-eater thoughtfully.

Half an hour later, Gurney touched him on the shoulder and beckoned him outside, where conversation was possible. "I sent him home, Bibbs. He'll have to be careful of that hand. Go get your overalls off. I'll take you for a drive and leave you at home."

"Can't," said Bibbs. "Got to stick to my job till the whistle blows."

"No, you don't," the doctor returned, smothering a yawn. "He wants me to take you down to my office and give you an overhauling to see how much harm these four days on the machine have done you. I guess you folks have got that old man pretty thoroughly upset, between you, up at your house! But I don't need to go over you. I can see with my eyes half shut——"

"Yes," Bibbs interrupted, "that's what they are."

"I say I can see you're starting out, at least, in good shape. What's made the difference?"

"I like the machine," said Bibbs. "I've made a friend of it. I serenade it and talk to it, and then it talks back to me."

"Indeed, indeed? What does it say?"

"What I want to hear."

"Well, well!" The doctor stretched himself and stamped his foot repeatedly. "Better come along and take a drive with me. You can take the time off that he allowed for the examination, and——"

"Not at all," said Bibbs. "I'm going to stand by my old zinc-eater till five o'clock. I tell you I *like* it!"

"Then I suppose that's the end of your wanting to write."

"I don't know about that," Bibbs said, thoughtfully; "but the zinc-eater doesn't interfere with my thinking, at least. It's better than being in business; I'm sure of that. I don't want anything to change. I'd be content to lead just the life I'm leading now to the end of my days."

"You do beat the devil!" exclaimed Gurney. "Your father's right when he tells me you're a mystery. Perhaps the Almighty knew what He was doing when He made you, but it takes a lot of faith to believe it! Well, I'm off. Go on back to your murdering old machine." He climbed into his car, which he operated himself, but he refrained from setting it immediately in motion. "Well, I rubbed it in on the old man that you had warned him not to slide his hand along too far, and that he got hurt because he didn't pay attention to your warning, and because he was trying to show you how to do something you were already doing a great deal better than he could. You tell him I'll be around to look at it and change the dressing to-morrow morning. Good-bye."

But when he paid the promised visit, the next morning, he did more than change the dressing upon the damaged hand. The injury was severe of its kind, and Gurney spent a long time over it, though Sheridan was rebellious and scornful, being brought to a degree of tractability only by means of horrible threats and talk of amputation. However, he appeared at the dinner-table with his hand supported in a sling which he seemed to regard as an indignity, while the natural inquiries upon the subject evidently struck him as deliberate insults. Mrs. Sheridan, having been unable to contain her solicitude several times during the day, and having

been checked each time in a manner that blanched her cheek, hastened to warn Roscoe and Sibyl, upon their arrival at five, to omit any reference to the injury and to avoid even looking at the sling if they possibly could.

The Sheridans dined on Sundays at five. Sibyl had taken pains not to arrive either before or after the hand was precisely on the hour; and the members of the family were all seated at the table within two minutes after she and Roscoe had entered the house.

It was a glum gathering, overhung with portents. The air seemed charged, awaiting any tiny ignition to explode; and Mrs. Sheridan's expression, as she sat with her eyes fixed almost continually upon her husband, was that of a person engaged in prayer. Edith was pale and intent. Roscoe looked ill; Sibyl looked ill; and Sheridan looked both ill and explosive. Bibbs had more colour than any of these, and there was a strange brightness, like a light, upon his face. It was curious to see anything so happy in the tense gloom of that household.

Edith ate little, but gazed nearly all the time at her plate. She never once looked at Sibyl, though Sibyl now and then gave her a quick glance, heavily charged, and then looked away. Roscoe ate nothing, and, like Edith, kept his eyes upon his plate and made believe to occupy himself with the viands thereon, loading his fork frequently, but not lifting it to his mouth. He did not once look at his father, though his father gazed heavily at him most of the time. And between Edith and Sibyl, and between Roscoe and his father, some bitter wireless communication seemed continually to be taking place throughout the long silences prevailing during this enlivening ceremony of Sabbath refection.

"Didn't you go to church this morning, Bibbs?" his mother asked, in the effort to break up one of those ghastly intervals.

"What did you say, mother?"

"Didn't you go to church this morning?"

"I think so," he answered, as from a roseate trance.

"You *think* so! Don't you know!"

"Oh yes. Yes, I went to church!"

"Which one?"

"Just down the street. It's brick."

"What was the sermon about?"

"What, mother?"

"Can't you hear me?" she cried. "I asked you what the sermon was about?"

He roused himself. "I think it was about——" He frowned, seeming to concentrate his will to recollect. "I think it was about something in the Bible."

White-jacket George was glad of an opportunity to leave the room and lean upon Mist' Jackson's shoulder in the pantry. "He don't know they *was* any suhmon!" he concluded, having narrated the dining-room dialogue. "All he know is he was with 'at lady lives nex' do'!" George was right.

"Did you go to church all by yourself, Bibbs?" Sibyl asked.

"No," he answered. "No, I didn't go alone."

"Oh?" Sibyl gave the ejaculation an upward twist, as of mocking inquiry, and followed it by another, expressive of hilarious comprehension. "*Oh!*"

Bibbs looked at her studiously, but she spoke no further. And that completed the conversation at the lugubrious feast.

Coffee came finally, was disposed of quickly, and the party dispersed to other parts of the house. Bibbs followed his father and Roscoe into the library, but was not well received.

"*You* go and listen to the phonograph with the womenfolks," Sheridan commanded.

Bibbs retreated. "Sometimes you do seem to be a hard sort of man!" he said.

However, he went obediently into the gilt-and-brocade room to which his mother and his sister and his sister-in-law had helplessly withdrawn, according to their Sabbatical custom. Edith sat in a corner, tapping her feet together and looking at them; Sibyl sat in the centre of the room, examining a brooch which she had detached from her throat; and

Mrs. Sheridan was looking over a collection of records consisting exclusively of Caruso and rag-time. She selected one of the latter, remarking that she thought it "right pretty," and followed it with one of the former and the same remark.

As the second reached its conclusion, George appeared in the broad doorway, seeming to have an errand there, but he did not speak. Instead, he favoured Edith with a benevolent smile, and she immediately left the room, George stepping aside for her to precede him, and then disappearing after her in the hall with an air of successful diplomacy. He made it perfectly clear that Edith had given him secret instructions and that it had been his pride and pleasure to fulfil them to the letter.

Sibyl stiffened in her chair; her lips parted, and she watched with curious eyes the vanishing back of the white jacket.

"What's that?" she asked, in a low voice, but sharply.

"Here's another right pretty record," said Mrs. Sheridan, affecting—with patent nervousness—not to hear. And she unloosed the music.

Sibyl bit her lip and began to tap her chin with the brooch. After a little while she turned to Bibbs, who reposed at half-length in a gold chair, with his eyes closed.

"Where did Edith go?" she asked, curiously.

"Edith?" he repeated, opening his eyes blankly. "Is she gone?"

Sibyl got up and stood in the doorway. She leaned against the casing, still tapping her chin with the brooch. Her eyes were dilating; she was suddenly at high tension, and her expression had become one of sharp excitement. She listened intently.

When the record was spun out she could hear Sheridan rumbling in the library, during the ensuing silence, and Roscoe's voice, querulous and husky: "I won't say anything at all. I tell you, you might just as well let me alone!"

But there were other sounds: a rustling and murmur, whispering, low protesting cadences in a male voice. And as

Mrs. Sheridan started another record, a sudden, vital resolve leaped like fire in the eyes of Sibyl. She walked down the hall and straight into the smoking-room.

Lamhorn and Edith both sprang to their feet, separating. Edith became instantly deathly white with a rage that set her shaking from head to foot, and Lamhorn stuttered as he tried to speak.

But Edith's shaking was not so violent as Sibyl's, nor was her face so white. At sight of them and of their embrace, all possible consequences became nothing to Sibyl. She courtesied, holding up her skirts and contorting her lips to the semblance of a smile.

"Sit just as you were—both of you!" she said. And then to Edith: "Did you tell my husband I had been telephoning to Lamhorn?"

"You march out of here!" said Edith, fiercely. "March straight out of here!"

Sibyl levelled a forefinger at Lamhorn.

"Did you tell her I'd been telephoning you I wanted you to come?"

"Oh, good God!" Lamhorn said. "Hush!"

"You knew she'd tell my husband, *didn't* you?" she cried. "You knew that!"

"*Hush!*" he begged, panic-stricken.

"That was a *manly* thing to do! Oh, it was like a gentleman! You wouldn't come—you wouldn't even come for five minutes to hear what I had to say! You were *tired* of what I had to say! You'd heard it all a thousand times before, and you wouldn't come! No! No! *No!*" she stormed. "You wouldn't even come for five minutes, but you could tell that little cat! And *she* told my husband! You're a *man!*"

Edith saw in a flash that the consequences of battle would be ruinous to Sibyl, and the furious girl needed no further temptation to give way to her feelings. "Get out of this house!" she shrieked. "This is my father's house. Don't you dare speak to Robert like that!"

"No! No! I mustn't *speak*——"

"Don't you *dare!*"

Edith and Sibyl began to scream insults at each other simultaneously, fronting each other, their furious faces close. Their voices shrilled, and rose and cracked—they screeched. They could be heard over the noise of the phonograph, which was playing a brass-band selection. They could be heard all over the house. They were heard in the kitchen; they could have been heard in the cellar. Neither of them cared for that.

"You told my husband!" screamed Sibyl, bringing her face still closer to Edith's. "You told my husband! This man put *that* in your hands to strike me with! *He* did!"

"I'll tell your husband again! I'll tell him everything I know! It's *time* your husband——"

They were swept asunder by a bandaged hand. "Do you want the neighbours in?" Sheridan thundered.

There fell a shocking silence. Frenzied Sibyl saw her husband and his mother in the doorway, and she understood what she had done. She moved slowly toward the door; then suddenly she began to run. She ran into the hall, and through it, and out of the house. Roscoe followed her heavily, his eyes on the ground.

"*Now then!*" said Sheridan to Lamhorn.

The words were indefinite, but the voice was not. Neither was the vicious gesture of the bandaged hand, which concluded its orbit in the direction of the door in a manner sufficient for the swift dispersal of George and Jackson and several female servants who hovered behind Mrs. Sheridan. They fled lightly.

"Papa, papa!" wailed Mrs. Sheridan. "Look at your hand! You'd oughtn't to been so rough with Edie; you hurt your hand on her shoulder. Look!"

There was, in fact, a spreading red stain upon the bandages at the tips of the fingers, and Sheridan put his hand back in the sling. "Now then!" he repeated. "You goin' to leave my house?"

"He will *not!*" sobbed Edith. "Don't you *dare* order him out!"

"Don't you bother, dear," said Lamhorn, quietly. "He doesn't understand. *You* mustn't be troubled." Pallor was becoming to him; he looked very handsome, and as he left the room he seemed in the girl's distraught eyes a persecuted noble, indifferent to the rabble yawping insult at his heels—the rabble being enacted by her father.

"Don't come back, either!" said Sheridan, realistic in this impersonation. "Keep off the premises!" he called savagely into the hall. "This family's through with you!"

"It is *not!*" Edith cried, breaking from her mother. "You'll *see* about that! You'll find out! You'll find out what'll happen! What's *he* done? I guess if *I* can stand it, it's none of *your* business, is it? What's *he* done, I'd like to know? You don't know anything about it. Don't you s'pose he told *me?* She was crazy about him soon as he began going there, and he flirted with her a little. That's everything he did, and it was before he met *me!* After that he wouldn't, and it wasn't anything, anyway—he never was serious a minute about it. *She* wanted it to be serious, and she was bound she wouldn't give him up. He told her long ago he cared about me, but she kept persecuting him and——"

"Yes," said Sheridan, sternly; "that's *his* side of it! That'll do! He doesn't come in this house again!"

"You look out!" Edith cried.

"Yes, I'll look out! I'd 'a' told you to-day he wasn't to be allowed on the premises, but I had other things on my mind. I had Abercrombie look up this young man privately, and he's no 'count. He's no 'count on earth! He's no good! He's *nothin'!* But it wouldn't matter if he was George Washington, after what's happened and what I've heard to-night!"

"But, papa," Mrs. Sheridan began, "if Edie says it was all Sibyl's fault, makin' up to him, and he never encouraged her much, nor——"

"'S enough!" he roared. "He keeps off these premises! And if any of you so much as ever speak his name to me again——"

But Edith screamed, clapping her hands over her ears

to shut out the sound of his voice, and ran upstairs, sobbing loudly, followed by her mother. However, Mrs. Sheridan descended a few minutes later and joined her husband in the library. Bibbs, still sitting in his gold chair, saw her pass, roused himself from reverie, and strolled in after her.

"She locked her door," said Mrs. Sheridan, shaking her head woefully. "She wouldn't even answer me. They wasn't a sound from her room."

"Well," said her husband, "she can settle her mind to it. She never speaks to that fellow again, and if he tries to telephone her to-morrow—— Here! You tell the help if he calls up to ring off and say it's my orders. No, you needn't. I'll tell 'em myself."

"Better not," said Bibbs, gently.

His father glared at him.

"It's no good," said Bibbs. "Mother, when you were in love with father——"

"My goodness!" she cried. "You ain't a-goin' to compare your father to that——"

"Edith feels about him just what you did about father," said Bibbs. "And if *your* father had told you——"

"I won't *listen* to such silly talk!" she declared, angrily.

"So you're handin' out your advice, are you, Bibbs?" said Sheridan. "What is it?"

"Let her see him all she wants."

"You're a——" Sheridan gave it up. "I don't know what to call you!"

"Let her see him all she wants," Bibbs repeated, thoughtfully. "You're up against something too strong for you. If Edith were a weakling you'd have a chance this way, but she isn't. She's got a lot of your determination, father, and with what's going on inside of her she'll beat you. You can't keep her from seeing him, as long as she feels about him the way she does now. You can't make her think less of him, either. Nobody can. Your only chance is that she'll do it for herself, and if you give her time and go easy she probably will. Marriage would do it for her quickest, but that's just

what you don't want, and as you *don't* want it, you'd better——"

"I can't stand any more!" Sheridan burst out. "If it's come to *Bibbs* advisin' me how to run this house I better resign. Mamma, where's that nigger George? Maybe *he's* got some plan how I better manage my family. Bibbs, for God's sake go and lay down! 'Let her see him all she wants'! Oh, Lord! here's wisdom; here's——"

"Bibbs," said Mrs. Sheridan, "if you haven't got anything to do, you might step over and take Sibyl's wraps home—she left 'em in the hall. I don't think you seem to quiet your poor father very much just now."

"All right." And Bibbs bore Sibyl's wraps across the street and delivered them to Roscoe, who met him at the door. Bibbs said only, "Forgot these," and, "Good-night, Roscoe," cordially and cheerfully, and returned to the New House. His mother and father were still talking in the library, but with discretion he passed rapidly on and upward to his own room, and there he proceeded to write in his note-book.

CHAPTER XXI

THERE seems to be another curious thing about Love [Bibbs wrote]. Love is blind while it lives and only opens its eyes and becomes very wide awake when it dies. Let it alone until then.

You cannot reason with love or with any other passion. The wise will not wish for love—nor for ambition. These are passions and bring others in their train—hatreds and jealousies—all blind. Friendship and a quiet heart for the wise.

What a turbulence is love! It is dangerous for a blind thing to be turbulent; there are precipices in life. One would not cross a mountain-pass with a thick cloth over his eyes. Lovers do. Friendship walks gently and with open eyes.

To walk to church with a friend! To sit beside her there! To rise when she rises, and to touch with one's thumb and fingers the other half of the hymn-book that she holds! What lover, with his fierce ways, could know this transcendent happiness?

Friendship brings everything that heaven could bring. There is no labour that cannot become a living rapture if you know that a friend is thinking of you as you labour. So you sing at your work. For the work is part of the thoughts of your friend; so you love it!

Love is demanding and claiming and insistent. Friendship is all kindness—it makes the world glorious with kindness. What colour you see when you walk with a friend! You see that the gray sky is brilliant and shimmering; you see that the smoke has warm browns and is marvellously sculptured—the air becomes iridescent. You see the gold in brown hair. Light floods everything.

When you walk to church with a friend you know that life can give you nothing richer. You pray that there will be no change in anything forever.

What an adorable thing it is to discover a little foible in your friend, a bit of vanity that gives you one thing more about her to adore! On a cold morning she will perhaps walk to church with you without her furs, and she will blush and return an evasive answer when you ask her why she does not wear them. You will say no more, because

you understand. She looks beautiful in her furs; you love their darkness against her cheek; but you comprehend that they conceal the loveliness of her throat and the fine line of her chin, and that she also has comprehended this, and, wishing to look still more bewitching, discards her furs at the risk of taking cold. So you hold your peace, and try to look as if you had not thought it out.

This theory is satisfactory except that it does not account for the absence of the muff. Ah, well, there must always be a mystery somewhere! Mystery is a part of enchantment.

Manual labour is best. Your heart can sing and your mind can dream while your hands are working. You could not have a singing heart and a dreaming mind all day if you had to scheme out dollars, or if you had to add columns of figures. Those things take your attention. You cannot be thinking of your friend while you write letters beginning, "Yours of the 17th inst. rec'd and contents duly noted." But to work with your hands all day, thinking and singing, and then, after nightfall, to hear the ineffable kindness of your friend's greeting—always there—for you! Who would wake from such a dream as this?

Dawn and the sea—music in moonlit gardens—nightingales serenading through almond-groves in bloom—what could bring such things into the city's turmoil? Yet they are here, and roses blossom in the soot. That is what it means not to be alone! That is what a friend gives you!

Having thus demonstrated that he was about twenty-five and had formed a somewhat indefinite definition of friendship, but one entirely his own (and perhaps Mary's) Bibbs went to bed, and was the only Sheridan to sleep soundly through the night and to wake at dawn with a light heart.

His cheerfulness was vaguely diminished by the troublous state of affairs in his family. He had recognized his condition when he wrote, "Who would wake from such a dream as this?" Bibbs was a sympathetic person, easily touched, but he was indeed living in a dream, and all things outside of it were veiled and remote—for that is the way of youth in a dream. And Bibbs, who had never before been of any age, either old or young, had come to his youth at last.

He went whistling from the house before even his father had come downstairs. There was a fog outdoors, saturated with a fine powder of soot, and though Bibbs noticed absently the dim shape of an automobile at the curb before Roscoe's house, he did not recognize it as Dr. Gurney's, but went cheerily on his way through the dingy mist. And when he was once more installed beside his faithful zinc-eater he whistled and sang to it, as other workmen did to their own machines sometimes, when things went well. His comrades in the shop glanced at him amusedly now and then. They liked him, and he ate his lunch at noon with a group of Socialists who approved of his ideas and talked of electing him to their association.

The short days of the year had come, and it was dark before the whistles blew. When the signal came, Bibbs went to the office, where he divested himself of his overalls—his single divergence from the routine of his fellow-workmen—and after that he used soap and water copiously. This was his transformation scene: he passed into the office a rather frail young working-man noticeably begrimed, and passed out of it to the pavement a cheerfully preoccupied sample of gentry, fastidious to the point of elegance.

The sidewalk was crowded with the bearers of dinner-pails, men and boys and women and girls from the work-rooms that closed at five. Many hurried and some loitered; they went both east and west, jostling one another, and Bibbs, turning his face homeward, was forced to go slowly.

Coming toward him, as slowly, through the crowd, a tall girl caught sight of his long, thin figure, and stood still until he had almost passed her, for in the thick crowd and the thicker gloom he did not recognize her, though his shoulder actually touched hers. He would have gone by, but she laughed delightedly; and he stopped short, startled. Two boys, one chasing the other, swept between them, and Bibbs stood still, peering about him in deep perplexity. She leaned toward him.

"I knew *you!*" she said.

"Good heavens!" cried Bibbs. "I thought it was your voice coming out of a star!"

"There's only smoke overhead," said Mary, and laughed again. "There aren't any stars."

"Oh yes, there were—when you laughed!"

She took his arm, and they went on. "I've come to walk home with you, Bibbs. I wanted to."

"But were you here in the——"

"In the dark? Yes! Waiting? Yes!"

Bibbs was radiant; he felt suffocated with happiness. He began to scold her.

"But it's not safe, and I'm not worth it. You shouldn't have—— You ought to know better. What did——"

"I only waited about twelve seconds," she laughed. "I'd just got here."

"But to come all this way and to this part of town in the dark, you——"

"I was in this part of town already," she said. "At least, I was only seven or eight blocks away, and it was dark when I came out, and I'd have had to go home alone—and I preferred going home with you."

"It's pretty beautiful for me," said Bibbs, with a deep breath. "You'll never know what it was to hear your laugh in the darkness—and then to—to see you standing there! Oh, it was like—it was like—— How can I *tell* you what it was like?" They had passed beyond the crowd now, and a crossing-lamp shone upon them, which revealed the fact that again she was without her furs. Here was a puzzle. Why did that adorable little vanity of hers bring her out without them in the *dark?* But of course she had gone out long before dark. For undefinable reasons this explanation was not quite satisfactory; however, allowing it to stand, his solicitude for her took another turn. "I think you ought to have a car," he said, "especially when you want to be out after dark. You need one in winter, anyhow. Have you ever asked your father for one?"

"No," said Mary. "I don't think I'd care for one particularly."

"I wish you would." Bibbs's tone was earnest and troubled. "I think in winter you——"

"No, no," she interrupted, lightly. "I don't need——"

"But my mother tried to insist on sending one over here every afternoon for me. I wouldn't let her, because I like the walk, but a girl——"

"A girl likes to walk, too," said Mary. "Let me tell you where I've been this afternoon and how I happened to be near enough to make you take me home. I've been to see a little old man who makes pictures of the smoke. He has a sort of warehouse for a studio, and he lives there with his mother and his wife and their seven children, and he's gloriously happy. I'd seen one of his pictures at an exhibition, and I wanted to see more of them, so he showed them to me. He has almost everything he ever painted; I don't suppose he's sold more than four or five pictures in his life. He gives drawing-lessons to keep alive."

"How do you mean he paints the smoke?" Bibbs asked.

"Literally. He paints from his studio window and from the street—anywhere. He just paints what's around him—and it's beautiful."

"The smoke?"

"Wonderful! He sees the sky through it, somehow. He does the ugly roofs of cheap houses through a haze of smoke, and he does smoky sunsets and smoky sunrises, and he has other things with the heavy, solid, slow columns of smoke going far out and growing more ethereal and mixing with the hazy light in the distance; and he has others with the broken sky-line of downtown, all misted with the smoke and with puffs and jets of vapour that have colours like an orchard in mid-April. I'm going to take you there some Sunday afternoon, Bibbs."

"You're showing me the town," he said. "I didn't know what was in it at all."

"There are workers in beauty here," she told him, gently.

"There are other painters more prosperous than my friend. There are all sorts of things."

"I didn't know."

"No. Since the town began growing so great that it called itself 'greater,' one could live here all one's life and know only the side of it that shows."

"The beauty-workers seem buried very deep," said Bibbs. "And I imagine that your friend who makes the smoke beautiful must be buried deepest of all. My father loves the smoke, but I can't imagine his buying one of your friend's pictures. He'd buy the 'Bay of Naples,' but he wouldn't get one of those. He'd think smoke in a picture was horrible—unless he could use it for an advertisement."

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully. "And really he's the town. They *are* buried pretty deep, it seems, sometimes, Bibbs."

"And yet it's all wonderful," he said. "It's wonderful to me."

"You mean the town is wonderful to you?"

"Yes, because everything is, since you called me your friend. The city is only a rumble on the horizon for me. It can't come any closer than the horizon so long as you let me see you standing by my old zinc-eater all day long, helping me. Mary——" He stopped with a gasp. "That's the first time I've called you 'Mary'!"

"Yes." She laughed, a little tremulously. "Though I wanted you to!"

"I said it without thinking. It must be because you came there to walk home with me. That must be it."

"Women like to have things said," Mary informed him, her tremulous laughter continuing. "Were you glad I came for you?"

"No—not 'glad.' I felt as if I were being carried straight up and up and up—over the clouds. I feel like that still. I think I'm that way most of the time. I wonder what I was like before I knew you. The person I was then seems to have been somebody else, not Bibbs Sheridan at all. It seems long, long ago. I was gloomy and sickly—somebody else—some-

body I don't understand now, a coward afraid of shadows—afraid of things that didn't exist—afraid of my old zinc-eater! And now I'm only afraid of what might change anything."

She was silent a moment, and then, "You're happy, Bibbs?" she asked.

"Ah, don't you see?" he cried. "I want it to last for a thousand, thousand years, just as it is! You've made me so rich, I'm a miser. I wouldn't have one thing different—nothing, nothing!"

"Dear Bibbs!" she said, and laughed happily.

CHAPTER XXII

BIBBS continued to live in the shelter of his dream. He had told Edith, after his ineffective effort to be useful in her affairs, that he had decided that he was "a member of the family"; but he appeared to have relapsed to the retired list after that one attempt at participancy—he was far enough detached from membership now. These were turbulent days in the New House, but Bibbs had no part whatever in the turbulence—he seemed an absent-minded stranger, present by accident and not wholly aware that he was present. He would sit, faintly smiling over pleasant imaginings and dear reminiscences of his own, while battle raged between Edith and her father, or while Sheridan unloosed jeremiads upon the sullen Roscoe, who drank heavily to endure them. The happy dreamer wandered into storm-areas like a somnambulist, and wandered out again unawakened. He was sorry for his father and for Roscoe, and for Edith and for Sibyl, but their sufferings and outcries seemed far away.

Sibyl was under Gurney's care. Roscoe had sent for him on Sunday night, not long after Bibbs returned the abandoned wraps; and during the first days of Sibyl's illness the doctor found it necessary to be with her frequently, and to install a muscular nurse. And whether he would or no, Gurney received from his hysterical patient a variety of pungent information which would have staggered anybody but a family physician. Among other things, he was given to comprehend the change in Bibbs, and why the zinc-eater was not putting a lump in its operator's gizzard as of yore.

Sibyl was not delirious—she was a thin little ego writhing and shrieking in pain. Life had hurt her, and had driven her into hurting herself; her condition was only the adult's terrible exaggeration of that of a child after a bad bruise—there must be screaming, and telling mother all about the

hurt and how it happened. Sibyl babbled herself hoarse when Gurney withheld morphine. She went from the beginning to the end in a breath. No protest stopped her; nothing stopped her.

"You ought to let me die!" she wailed. "It's cruel not to let me die! What harm have I ever done to anybody that you want to keep me alive? Just look at my life! I only married Roscoe to get away from home, and look what that got me into!—look where I am now! He brought me to this town, and what did I have in my life but his *family?* And they didn't even know the right crowd! If they had, it might have been *something!* I had nothing—nothing—nothing in the world! I wanted to have a good time—and how could I? Where's any good time among these Sheridans? They never even had wine on the table! I thought I was marrying into a rich family where I'd meet attractive people I'd read about, and travel, and go to dances—and, oh, my Lord! all I got was these Sheridans! I did the best I could; I did, indeed! Oh, I *did!* I just tried to live. Every woman's got a right to live, some time in her life, I guess! Things were just beginning to look brighter—we'd moved up here, and that frozen crowd across the street were after Jim for their daughter, and they'd have started us with the right people—and then I saw how Edith was getting him away from me. She did it, too! She got him! A girl with money can do that to a married woman—yes, she can, every time! And what could I do? What can any woman do in my fix? I couldn't do *anything* but try to stand it—and I couldn't stand it! I went to that icicle—that Vertrees girl—and she could have helped me a little, and it wouldn't have hurt her. It wouldn't have done her any harm to help me *that* little! She treated me as if I'd been dirt that she wouldn't even take the trouble to sweep out of her house! Let her *wait!*" Sibyl's voice hoarse, from babbling, became no more than a husky whisper, though she strove to make it louder. She struggled half upright, and the nurse restrained her. "I'd get up out of this bed to show her she can't do such things to me! I was absolutely ladylike,

and she walked out and left me there alone! She'll *see!* She started after Bibbs before Jim's casket was fairly underground, and she thinks she's landed that poor loon—but she'll see! She'll see! If I'm ever able to walk across the street again I'll show her how to treat a woman in trouble that comes to her for help! It wouldn't have hurt her any—it wouldn't—it wouldn't. And Edith needn't have told what she told Roscoe—it wouldn't have hurt her to let me alone. And *he* told her I bored him—telephoning him I wanted to see him. He needn't have done it! He needn't—needn't——" Her voice grew fainter, for that while, with exhaustion, though she would go over it all again as soon as her strength returned. She lay panting. Then, seeing her husband standing dishevelled in the doorway, "Don't come in, Roscoe," she murmured. "I don't want to see you." And as he turned away she added, "I'm kind of sorry for you, Roscoe."

Her antagonist, Edith, was not more coherent in her own wailings, and she had the advantage of a mother for listener. She had also the disadvantage of a mother for duenna, and Mrs. Sheridan, under her husband's sharp tutelage, proved an effective one. Edith was reduced to telephoning Lamhorn from shops whenever she could juggle her mother into a momentary distraction over a counter.

Edith was incomparably more in love than before Lamhorn's expulsion. Her whole being was nothing but the determination to hurdle everything that separated her from him. She was in a state that could be altered by only the lightest and most delicate diplomacy of suggestion, but Sheridan, like legions of other parents, intensified her passion and fed it hourly fuel by opposing to it an intolerable force. He swore she should cool, and thus set her on fire.

Edith planned neatly. She fought hard, every other evening, with her father, and kept her bed between times to let him see what his violence had done to her. Then, when the mere sight of her set him to breathing fast, she said pitiably that she might bear her trouble better if she went away; it was impossible to be in the same town with Lamhorn and not

think always of him. Perhaps in New York she might forget a little. She had written to a school friend, established quietly with an aunt in apartments—and a month or so of theatres and restaurants might bring peace. Sheridan shouted with relief; he gave her a copious cheque, and she left upon a Monday morning, wearing violets with her mourning and having kissed everybody good-bye except Sibyl and Bibbs. She might have kissed Bibbs, but he failed to realize that the day of her departure had arrived, and was surprised, on returning from his zinc-eater, that evening, to find her gone. "I suppose they'll be married there," he said, casually.

Sheridan, seated, warming his stockinged feet at the fire, jumped up, fuming. "Either you go out o' here, or I will, Bibbs!" he snorted. "I don't want to be in the same room with the particular kind of idiot you are! She's through with that riffraff; all she needed was to be kept away from him a few weeks, and I *kept* her away, and it did the business. For Heaven's sake, go on out o' here!"

Bibbs obeyed the gesture of a hand still bandaged. And the black silk sling was still round Sheridan's neck, but no word of Gurney's and no excruciating twinge of pain could keep Sheridan's hand in the sling. The wounds, slight enough originally, had become infected the first time he had dislodged the bandages, and healing was long delayed. Sheridan had the habit of gesture; he could not "take time to remember," he said, that he must be careful, and he had also a curious indignation with his hurt; he refused to pay it the compliment of admitting its existence.

The Saturday following Edith's departure Gurney came to the Sheridan Building to dress the wounds and to have a talk with Sheridan which the doctor felt had become necessary. But he was a little before the appointed time and was obliged to wait a few minutes in an anteroom—there was a directors' meeting of some sort in Sheridan's office. The door was slightly ajar, leaking cigar-smoke and oratory, the latter all Sheridan's, and Gurney listened.

"No, sir; no, sir; no, sir!" he heard the big voice rumbling,

and then, breaking into thunder, "I tell you NO! Some o' you men make me sick! You'd lose your confidence in Almighty God if a doodlebug flipped his hind leg at you! You say money's tight all over the country. Well, what if it is? There's no reason for it to be tight, and it's not goin' to keep *our* money tight! You're always runnin' to the woodshed to hide your nickels in a crack because some fool newspaper says the market's a little skeery! You listen tc every street-corner croaker, like old man Skelley, and then come and set here and try to scare *me* out of a big thing! We're *in* on this —understand? I tell you there never *was* better times. These are good times and big times, and I won't stand for any other kind o' talk. This country's on its feet as it never was before, and this city's on its feet and goin' to stay there!" And Gurney heard a series of whacks and thumps upon the desk. "'Bad times!'" Sheridan vociferated, with accompanying thumps. "Rabbit talk! These times are glorious, I tell you! We're in the promised land, and as Dan Oliphant says we're goin' to *stay* there! That's all, gentlemen. The loan goes!"

The directors came forth, flushed and murmurous, and Gurney hastened in. His guess was correct: Sheridan had been thumping the desk with his right hand. The physician scolded wearily, making good the fresh damage as best he might; and then he said what he had to say on the subject of Roscoe and Sibyl, his opinion meeting, as he expected, a warmly hostile reception. But the result of this conversation was that by telephonic command Roscoe awaited his father, an hour later, in the library at the New House.

"Gurney says your wife's able to travel," Sheridan said, brusquely, as he came in.

"Yes." Roscoe occupied a deep chair and sat in the dejected attitude which had become his habit. "Yes, she is."

"Edith had to leave town, and so Sibyl thinks she'll have to, too!"

"Oh, I wouldn't put it that way," Roscoe protested, drearily.

"No, I hear *you* wouldn't!" There was a bitter gibe in the

father's voice, and he added: "It's a good thing she's goin' abroad—if she'll stay there. I shouldn't think any of us want her here any more—you least of all!"

"It's no use your talking that way," said Roscoe. "You won't do any good."

"Well, when you comin' back to your office?" Sheridan used a brisker, kinder tone. "Three weeks since you showed up there at all. When you goin' to be ready to cut out whiskey and all the rest o' the foolishness and start in again? You ought to be able to make up for a lot o' lost time and a lot o' spilt milk when that woman takes herself out o' the way and lets you and all the rest of us alone."

"It's no use, father, I tell you. I know what Gurney was going to say to you. I'm not going back to the office. I'm *done!*"

"Wait a minute before you talk that way!" Sheridan began his sentry-go up and down the room. "I suppose you know it's taken two pretty good men about sixteen hours a day to set things straight and get 'em runnin' right again, down in your office?"

"They must be good men." Roscoe nodded indifferently. "I thought I was doing about eight men's work. I'm glad you found two that could handle it."

"Look here! If I worked you it was for your own good. There are plenty men drive harder 'n *I* do, and——"

"Yes. There are some that break down all the other men that work with 'em. They either die, or go crazy, or have to quit, and are no use the rest of their lives. The last's my case, I guess—'complicated by domestic difficulties'!"

"You set there and tell me you give up?" Sheridan's voice shook, and so did the gesticulating hand which he extended appealingly toward the despondent figure. "Don't do it, Roscoe! Don't say it! Say you'll come down there again and be a man! This woman ain't goin' to trouble you any more. The work ain't goin' to hurt you if you haven't got her to worry you, and you can get shut o' this nasty whiskey-guzzlin'; it ain't fastened on you yet. Don't say——"

"It's no use on earth," Roscoe mumbled. "No use on earth."

"Look here! If you want another month's vacation——"

"I know Gurney told you, so what's the use talking about 'vacations'?"

"Gurney!" Sheridan vociferated the name savagely. "It's Gurney, Gurney, Gurney! Always Gurney! I don't know what the world's comin' to with everybody runnin' around squealin', 'The doctor says this,' and, 'The doctor says that'! It makes me sick! How's this country expect to get its Work done if Gurney and all the other old nanny-goats keep up this blattin'—'Oh, oh! Don't lift that stick o' wood; you'll ruin your *nerves!*' So he says you got 'nervous exhaustion induced by overwork and emotional strain.' They always got to stick the Work in if they see a chance! I reckon you did have the 'emotional strain,' and that's all's the matter with you. You'll be over it soon's this woman's gone, and Work's the very thing to make you quit frettin' about her."

"Did Gurney tell you I was fit to work?"

"Shut up!" Sheridan bellowed. "I'm so sick o' that man's name I feel like shootin' anybody that says it to me!" He fumed and chafed, swearing indistinctly, then came and stood before his son. "Look here; do you think you're doin' the square thing by me? Do you? How much you worth?"

"I've got between seven and eight thousand a year clear, of my own, outside the salary. That much is mine whether I work or not."

"It is? You could 'a' pulled it out without me, I suppose you think, at your age?"

"No. But it's mine, and it's enough."

"My Lord! It's about what a Congressman gets, and you want to quit there! I suppose you think you'll get the rest when *I* kick the bucket, and all you have to do is lay back and wait! You let me tell you right here, you'll never see one cent of it. You go out o' business now, and what would you know about handlin' it five or ten or twenty years from now? Because I intend to *stay* here a little while yet, my boy! They'd

either get it away from you or you'd sell for a nickel and let it be split up and——" He whirled about, marched to the other end of the room, and stood silent a moment. Then he said, solemnly: "Listen. If you go out now, you leave me in the lurch, with nothin' on God's green earth to depend on but your brother—and you know what he is. I've depended on you for it *all* since Jim died. Now you've listened to that dam' doctor, and he says maybe you won't ever be as good a man as you were, and that certainly you won't be for a year or so—probably more. Now, that's all a lie. Men don't break down that way at your age. Look at *me!* And *I* tell you, you can shake this thing off. All you need is a little *get*-up and a little gumption. Men don't go away for *years* and then come back into *moving* businesses like ours—they lose the strings. And if you could, I won't let you—if you lay down on me now, I won't—and that's because if you lay down you prove you ain't the man I thought you were." He cleared his throat and finished quietly: "Roscoe, will you take a month's vacation and come back and go to it?"

"No," said Roscoe, listlessly. "I'm through."

"All right," said Sheridan. He picked up the evening paper from a table, went to a chair by the fire and sat down, his back to his son. "Good-bye."

Roscoe rose, his head hanging, but there was a dull relief in his eyes. "Best I can do," he muttered, seeming about to depart, yet lingering. "I figure it out a good deal like this," he said. "I didn't *know* my job was any strain, and I managed all right, but from what Gur—from what I hear, I was just up to the limit of my nerves from overwork, and the—the trouble at home was the extra strain that's fixed me the way I am. I tried to brace, so I could stand the work and the trouble too, on whiskey—and that put the finish to me! I—I'm not hitting it as hard as I was for a while, and I reckon pretty soon, if I can get to feeling a little more energy, I better try to quit entirely—I don't know. I'm all in—and the doctor says so. I thought I was running along fine up to a few months ago, but all the time I was ready to bust, and

didn't know it. Now, then, I don't want you to blame Sibyl, and if I were you I wouldn't speak of her as 'that woman,' because she's your daughter-in-law and going to stay that way. She didn't do anything wicked. It was a shock to me, and I don't deny it, to find what she had done—encouraging that fellow to hang around her after he began trying to flirt with her, and losing her head over him the way she did. I don't deny it was a shock and that it'll always be a hurt inside of me I'll never get over. But it was my fault; I didn't understand a woman's nature." Poor Roscoe spoke in the most profound and desolate earnest. "A woman craves society, and gaiety, and meeting attractive people, and travelling. Well, I can't give her the other things, but I can give her the travelling—real travelling, not just going to Atlantic City or New Orleans, the way she has, two, three times. A woman has to have something in her life besides a business man. And that's *all* I was. I never understood till I heard her talking when she was so sick, and I believe if you'd heard her then you wouldn't speak so hard-heartedly about her; I believe you might have forgiven her like I have. That's all. I never cared anything for any girl but her in my life, but I was so busy with business I put it ahead of her. I never *thought* about her, I was so busy thinking business. Well, this is where it's brought us to—and now when you talk about 'business' to me I feel the way you do when anybody talks about Gurney to you. The word 'business' makes me dizzy—it makes me honestly sick at the stomach. I believe if I had to go downtown and step inside that office door I'd fall down on the floor, deathly sick. You talk about a 'month's vacation'—and I get just as sick. I'm rattled—I can't plan—I haven't got any plans—can't make any, except to take my girl and get just as far away from that office as I can—and stay. We're going to Japan first, and if we——"

His father rustled the paper. "I said good-bye, Roscoe."

"Good-bye," said Roscoe, listlessly.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHERIDAN waited until he heard the sound of the outer door closing; then he rose and pushed a tiny disk set in the wall. Jackson appeared.

"Has Bibbs got home from work?"

"Mist' Bibbs? No, suh."

"Tell him I want to see him, soon as he comes."

"Yessuh."

Sheridan returned to his chair and fixed his attention fiercely upon the newspaper. He found it difficult to pursue the items beyond their explanatory rubrics—there was nothing unusual or startling to concentrate his attention:

"Motorman Puts Blame on Brakes. Three Killed when Car Slides." "Burglars Make Big Haul." "Board Works Approve Big Car-Line Extension." "Hold-up Men Injure Two. Man Found in Alley, Skull Fractured." "Sickening Story Told in Divorce Court." "Plan New Eighteen-story Structure." "School-girl Meets Death under Automobile." "Negro Cuts Three. One Dead." "Life Crushed Out. Third Elevator Accident in Same Building Causes Action by Coroner." "Declare Militia Will Be Menace. Polish Societies Protest to Governor in Church Rioting Case." "Short $3,500 in Accounts, Trusted Man Kills Self with Drug." "Found Frozen. Family Without Food or Fuel. Baby Dead when Parents Return Home from Seeking Work." "Minister Returned from Trip Abroad Lectures on Big Future of Our City. Sees Big Improvement During Short Absence. Says No European City Holds Candle." (Sheridan nodded approvingly here.)

Bibbs came through the hall whistling, and entered the room briskly. "Well, father, did you want me?"

"Yes. Sit down." Sheridan got up, and Bibbs took a seat

by the fire, holding out his hands to the crackling blaze, for it was cold outdoors.

"I came within seven of the shop record to-day," he said. "I handled more strips than any other workman has any day this month. The nearest to me is sixteen behind."

"There!" exclaimed his father, greatly pleased. "What'd I tell you? I'd like to hear Gurney hint again that I wasn't right in sending you there—I would just like to hear him! And you—ain't you ashamed of makin' such a fuss about it? Ain't you?"

"I didn't go at it in the right spirit the other time," Bibbs said, smiling brightly, his face ruddy in the cheerful firelight. "I didn't know the difference it meant to like a thing."

"Well, I guess I've pretty thoroughly vindicated my judgment. I guess I *have!* I said the shop 'd be good for you, and it was. I said it wouldn't hurt you, and it hasn't. It's been just exactly what I said it would be. Ain't that so?"

"Looks like it!" Bibbs agreed, gaily.

"Well, I'd like to know any place I been wrong, first and last! Instead o' hurtin' you, it's been the makin' of you—physically. You're a good inch taller'n what I am, and you'd be a bigger man than what I am if you'd get some flesh on your bones; and you *are* gettin' a little. Physically, it's started you out to be the huskiest one o' the whole family. Now, then, mentally—that's different. I don't say it unkindly, Bibbs, but you got to do something for yourself mentally, just like what's begun physically. And I'm goin' to help you."

Sheridan decided to sit down again. He brought his chair close to his son's, and, leaning over, tapped Bibbs's knee confidentially. "I got plans for you, Bibbs," he said.

Bibbs instantly looked thoroughly alarmed. He drew back. "I—I'm all right now, father."

"Listen." Sheridan settled himself in his chair, and spoke in the tone of a reasonable man reasoning. "Listen here, Bibbs. I had another blow to-day, and it was a hard one and

right in the face, though I *have* been expectin' it some little time back. Well, it's got to be met. Now I'll be frank with you. As I said a minute ago, mentally I couldn't ever called you exactly strong. You been a little weak both ways, most of your life. Not but what I think you *got* a mentality, if you'd learn to use it. You got will-power, I'll say that for you. I never knew boy or man that could be stubborner—never one in my life! Now, then, you've showed you could learn to run that machine best of any man in the shop, in no time at all. That looks to me like you could learn to do other things. I don't deny but what it's an encouragin' sign. I don't deny that, at all. Well, that helps me to think the case ain't so hopeless as it looks. You're all I got to meet this blow with, but maybe you ain't as poor material as I thought. Your tellin' me about comin' within seven strips of the shop's record to-day looks to me like encouragin' information brought in at just about the right time. Now, then, I'm goin to give you a raise. I wanted to send you straight on up through the shops—a year or two, maybe—but I can't do it. I lost Jim, and now I've lost Roscoe. He's quit. He's laid down on me. If he ever comes back at all, he'll be a long time pickin' up the strings, and, anyway, he ain't the man I thought he was. I can't count on him. I got to have *somebody* I *know* I can count on. And I'm down to this: you're my last chance. Bibbs, I got to learn you to use what brains you got and see if we can't develop 'em a little. Who knows? And I'm goin' to put my time in on it. I'm goin' to take you right downtown with *me*, and I won't be hard on you if you're a little slow at first. And I'm goin' to do the big thing for you. I'm goin' to make you feel you got to do the big thing for me, in return. I've vindicated my policy with you about the shop, and now I'm goin' to turn right around and swing you 'way over ahead of where the other boys started, and I'm goin' to make an appeal to your ambition that'll make you dizzy!" He tapped his son on the knee again. "Bibbs, I'm goin' to start you off this way: I'm goin' to make you a director in the Pump Works Company; I'm

goin' to make you vice-president of the Realty Company and a vice-president of the Trust Company!"

Bibbs jumped to his feet, blanched. "Oh no!" he cried.

Sheridan took his dismay to be the excitement of sudden joy. "Yes, sir! And there's some pretty fat little salaries goes with those vice-presidencies, and a pinch o' stock in the Pump Company with the directorship. You thought I was pretty mean about the shop—oh, I know you did!—but you see the old man can play it both ways. And so right now the minute you've begun to make good the way I wanted you to, I deal from the new deck. And I'll keep on handin' it out bigger and bigger every time you show me you're big enough to play the hand I deal you. I'm startin' you with a pretty big one, my boy!"

"But I don't—I don't—I don't want it!" Bibbs stammered.

"What 'd you say?" Sheridan thought he had not heard aright.

"I don't want it, father. I thank you—I do thank you——"

Sheridan looked perplexed. "What's the matter with you? Didn't you understand what I was tellin' you?"

"Yes."

"You sure? I reckon you didn't. I offered——"

"I know, I know! But I can't take it."

"What's the matter with you?" Sheridan was half amazed, half suspicious. "Your head feel funny?"

"I've never been quite so sane in my life," said Bibbs, "as I have lately. And I've got just what I want. I'm living exactly the right life. I'm earning my daily bread, and I'm happy in doing it. My wages are enough. I don't want any more money, and I don't deserve any——"

"Damnation!" Sheridan sprang up. "You've turned Socialist! You been listening to those fellows down there, and you——"

"No, sir. I think there's a great deal in what they say, but that isn't it."

Sheridan tried to restrain his growing fury, and succeeded partially. "Then what is it? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," his son returned, nervously. "Nothing—except that I'm content. I don't want to change anything."

"Why not?"

Bibbs had the incredible folly to try to explain. "I'll tell you, father, if I can. I know it may be hard to understand——"

"Yes, I think it may be," said Sheridan, grimly. "What you say usually is a *little* that way. Go on!"

Perturbed and distressed, Bibbs rose instinctively; he felt himself at every possible disadvantage. He was a sleeper clinging to a dream—a rough hand stretched to shake him and waken him. He went to a table and made vague drawings upon it with a finger, and as he spoke he kept his eyes lowered. "You weren't altogether right about the shop—that is, in one way you weren't, father." He glanced up apprehensively. Sheridan stood facing him, expressionless, and made no attempt to interrupt. "That's difficult to explain," Bibbs continued, lowering his eyes again, to follow the tracings of his finger. "I—I believe the shop might have done for me this time if I hadn't—if something hadn't helped me to—oh, not only to bear it, but to be happy in it. Well, I *am* happy in it. I want to go on just as I am. And of all things on earth that I don't want, I don't want to live a business life—I don't want to be drawn into it. I don't think it *is* living—and now I *am* living. I have the healthful toil—and I can think. In business as important as yours I couldn't think anything but business. I don't—I don't think making money is worth while."

"Go on," said Sheridan, curtly, as Bibbs paused timidly.

"It hasn't seemed to get anywhere, that *I* can see," said Bibbs. "You think this city is rich and powerful—but what's the use of its being rich and powerful? They don't teach the children any more in the schools because the city is rich and powerful. They teach them more than they used to because some people—not rich and powerful people—have

thought the thoughts to teach the children. And yet when you've been reading the paper I've heard you objecting to the children being taught anything except what would help them to make money. You said it was wasting the taxes. You want them taught to make a living, but not to live. When I was a little boy this wasn't an ugly town; now it's hideous. What's the use of being big just to be hideous? I mean I don't think all this has meant really going ahead—it's just been getting bigger and dirtier and noisier. Wasn't the whole country happier and in many ways wiser when it was smaller and cleaner and quieter and kinder? I know you think I'm an utter fool, father, but, after all, though, aren't business and politics just the housekeeping part of life? And wouldn't you despise a woman that not only made her housekeeping her ambition, but did it so noisily and dirtily that the whole neighbourhood was in a continual turmoil over it? And suppose she talked and thought about her housekeeping all the time, and was always having additions built to her house when she couldn't keep clean what she already had; and suppose, with it all, she made the house altogether unpeaceful and unlivable——"

"Just one minute!" Sheridan interrupted, adding, with terrible courtesy, "If you will permit me? Have you ever been right about anything?"

"I don't quite——"

"I ask the simple question: Have you ever been right about anything whatever in the course of your life? Have you ever been right upon any subject or question you've thought about and talked about? Can you mention one single time when you were proved to be right?"

He was flourishing the bandaged hand as he spoke, but Bibbs said only, "If I've always been wrong before, surely there's more chance that I'm right about this. It seems reasonable to suppose something would be due to bring up my average."

"Yes, I thought you wouldn't see the point. And there's another you probably couldn't see, but I'll take the liberty

to mention it. You been balkin all your life. Pretty much everything I ever wanted you to do, you'd let out *some* kind of a holler, like you are now—and yet I can't seem to remember once when you didn't have to lay down and do what I said. But go on with your remarks about our city and the business of this country. Go on!"

"I don't want to be part of it," said Bibbs, with unwonted decision. "I want to keep to myself, and I'm doing it now. I couldn't, if I went down there with you. I'd be swallowed into it. I don't care for money enough to——"

"No," his father interrupted, still dangerously quiet. "You've never had to earn a living. Anybody could tell that by what you say. Now, let me remind you: you're sleepin' in a pretty good bed; you're eatin' pretty fair food; you're wearin' pretty fine clothes. Just suppose one o' these noisy housekeepers—me, for instance—decided to let you do your own housekeepin'. May I ask what your proposition would be?"

"I'm earning nine dollars a week," said Bibbs, sturdily. "It's enough. I shouldn't mind at all."

"Who's payin' you that nine dollars a week?"

"My work!" Bibbs answered. "And I've done so well on that clipping-machine I believe I could work up to fifteen or even twenty a week at another job. I could be a fair plumber in a few months, I'm sure. I'd rather have a trade than be in business—I should, infinitely!"

"You better set about learnin' one pretty dam' quick!" But Sheridan struggled with his temper and again was partially successful in controlling it. "You better learn a trade over Sunday, because you're either goin' down with me to my office Monday morning—or—you can go to plumbing!"

"All right," said Bibbs, gently. "I can get along."

Sheridan raised his hands sardonically, as in prayer. "O God," he said, "this boy was crazy enough before he began to earn nine dollars a week, and now his money's gone to his head! Can't You do nothin' for him?" Then he flung his

hands apart, palms outward, in a furious gesture of dismissal. "Get out o' this room! You got a skull that's thicker'n a whale's thigh-bone, but it's cracked spang all the way across! You hated the machine-shop so bad when I sent you there, you went and stayed sick for over two years—and now, when I offer to take you out of it and give you the mint, you holler for the shop like a calf for its mammy! You're cracked! Oh, but I got a fine layout here! One son died, one quit, and one's a loon! The loon's all I got left! H. P. Ellersly's wife had a crazy brother, and they undertook to keep him at the house. First morning he was there he walked straight through a ten-dollar plate-glass window out into the yard. He says, 'Oh, look at the pretty dandelion!' That's what you're doin'! You want to spend your life sayin', 'Oh, look at the pretty dandelion!' and you don't care a tinker's dam' what you bust! Well, mister, loon or no loon, cracked and crazy or whatever you are, I'll take you with me Monday morning, and I'll work you and learn you—yes, and I'll lam you, if I got to—until I've made something out of you that's fit to be called a business man! I'll keep at you while I'm able to stand, and if I have to lay down to die I'll be whisperin' at you till they get the embalmin'-fluid into me! Now go on, and don't let me hear from you again till you can come and tell me you've waked up, you poor, pitiful, dandelion-pickin' *sleep-walker!*"

Bibbs gave him a queer look. There was something like reproach in it, for once; but there was more than that—he seemed to be startled by his father's last word.

CHAPTER XXIV

THERE was sleet that evening, with a whooping wind, but neither this storm nor that other which so imminently threatened him held place in the consciousness of Bibbs Sheridan when he came once more to the presence of Mary. All was right in his world as he sat with her, reading Maurice Maeterlinck's "Alladine and Palomides." The sorrowful light of the gas-jet might have been May morning sunshine flashing amber and rose through the glowing windows of the Sainte-Chapelle, it was so bright for Bibbs. And while the zinc-eater held out to bring him such golden nights as these, all the king's horses and all the king's men might not serve to break the spell.

Bibbs read slowly, but in a reasonable manner, as if he were talking; and Mary, looking at him steadily from beneath her curved fingers, appeared to discover no fault. It had grown to be her habit to look at him whenever there was an opportunity. It may be said, in truth, that while they were together, and it was light, she looked at him all the time.

When he came to the end of "Alladine and Palomides" they were silent a little while, considering together; then he turned back the pages and said:

"There's something I want to read over. This:

"You would think I threw a window open on the dawn. . . . She has a soul that can be seen around her—that takes you in its arms like an ailing child and without saying anything to you consoles you for everything. . . . I shall never understand it all. I do not know how it can all be, but my knees bend in spite of me when I speak of it. . . ."

He stopped and looked at her.

"You boy!" said Mary, not very clearly

"Oh yes," he returned. "But it's true—especially my knees!"

"You boy!" she murmured again, blushing charmingly. "You might read another line over. The first time I ever saw you, Bibbs, you were looking into a mirror. Do it again. But you needn't read it—I can give it to you: 'A little Greek slave that came from the heart of Arcady!'"

"*I!* I'm one of the hands at the Pump Works—and going to stay one, unless I have to decide to study plumbing."

"No." She shook her head. "You love and want what's beautiful and delicate and serene; it's really art that you want in your life, and have always wanted. You seemed to me, from the first, the most wistful person I had ever known, and that's what you were wistful for."

Bibbs looked doubtful and more wistful than ever; but after a moment or two the matter seemed to clarify itself to him. "Why, no," he said; "I wanted something else more than that. I wanted you."

"And here I am!" she laughed, completely understanding. "I think we're like those two in "The Cloister and the Hearth." *I*'m just the rough Burgundian cross-bow man, Denys, who followed that gentle Gerard and told everybody that the devil was dead."

"He isn't, though," said Bibbs, as a hoarse little bell in the next room began a series of snappings which proved to be ten, upon count. "He gets into the clock whenever I'm with you." And, sighing deeply, he rose to go.

"You're always very prompt about leaving me."

"I—I try to be," he said. "It isn't easy to be careful not to risk everything by giving myself a little more at a time. If I ever saw you look tired——"

"Have you ever?"

"Not yet. You always look—you always look——"

"How?"

"Care-free. That's it. Except when you feel sorry for me about something, you always have that splendid look. It puts courage into people to see it. If I had a struggle to face

I'd keep remembering that look—and I'd never give up! It's a brave look, too, as though gaiety might be a kind of gallantry on your part, and yet I don't quite understand why it should be, either." He smiled quizzically, looking down upon her. "Mary, you haven't a 'secret sorrow,' have you?"

For answer she only laughed.

"No," he said; "I can't imagine you with a care in the world. I think that's why you were so kind to me—you have nothing but happiness in your own life, and so you could spare time to make my troubles turn to happiness, too. But there's one little time in the twenty-four hours when I'm not happy. It's now, when I have to say good-night. I feel dismal every time it comes—and then, when I've left the house, there's a bad little blankness, a black void, as though I were temporarily dead; and it lasts until I get it established in my mind that I'm really beginning another day that's to end with *you* again. Then I cheer up. But now's the bad time—and I must go through it, and so—good-night." And he added with a pungent vehemence of which he was little aware, "I hate it!"

"Do you?" she said, rising to go to the door with him. But he stood motionless, gazing at her wonderingly

"Mary! Your eyes are so——" He stopped.

"Yes?" But she looked quickly away.

"I don't know," he said. "I thought just then——"

"What did you think?"

"I don't know—it seemed to me that there was something I ought to understand—and didn't."

She laughed and met his wondering gaze again frankly. "My eyes are pleased," she said. "I'm glad that you miss me a little after you go."

"But to-morrow's coming faster than other days if you'll let it," he said.

She inclined her head. "Yes. I'll—'let it'!"

"Going to church," said Bibbs. "It *is* going to church when I go with you!"

She went to the front door with him; she always went

that far. They had formed a little code of leave-taking, by habit, neither of them ever speaking of it; but it was always the same. She always stood in the doorway until he reached the sidewalk, and there he always turned and looked back, and she waved her hand to him. Then he went on, halfway to the New House, and looked back again, and Mary was not in the doorway, but the door was open and the light shone. It was as if she meant to tell him that she would never shut him out; he could always see that friendly light of the open doorway—as if it were open for him to come back, if he would. He could see it until a wing of the New House came between, when he went up the path. The open doorway seemed to him the beautiful symbol of her friendship—of her thought of him; a symbol of herself and of her ineffable kindness.

And she kept the door open—even to-night, though the sleet and fine snow swept in upon her bare throat and arms, and her brown hair was strewn with tiny white stars. His heart leaped as he turned and saw that she was there, waving her hand to him, as if she did not know that the storm touched her. When he had gone on, Mary did as she always did—she went into an unlit room across the hall from that in which they had spent the evening, and, looking from the window, watched him until he was out of sight. The storm made that difficult to-night, but she caught a glimpse of him under the street-lamp that stood between the two houses, and saw that he turned to look back again. Then, and not before, she looked at the upper windows of Roscoe's house across the street. They were dark. Mary waited, but after a little while she closed the front door and returned to her window. A moment later two of the upper windows of Roscoe's house flashed into light and a hand lowered the shade of one of them. Mary felt the cold then—it was the third night she had seen those windows lighted and that shade lowered, just after Bibbs had gone.

But Bibbs had no glance to spare for Roscoe's windows.

He stopped for his last look back at the open door, and, with a thin mantle of white already upon his shoulders, made his way, gasping in the wind, to the lee of the sheltering wing of the New House.

A stricken George, muttering hoarsely, admitted him, and Bibbs became aware of a paroxysm within the house. Terrible sounds came from the library: Sheridan cursing as never before; his wife sobbing, her voice rising to an agonized squeal of protest upon each of a series of muffled detonations—the outrageous thumping of a bandaged hand upon wood; then Gurney, sharply imperious, "Keep your hand in that sling! Keep your hand in that sling, I say!"

"*Look!*" George gasped, delighted to play herald for so important a tragedy; and he renewed upon his face the ghastly expression with which he had first beheld the ruins his calamitous gesture laid before the eyes of Bibbs. "Look at 'at lamidal statue!"

Gazing down the hall, Bibbs saw heroic wreckage, seemingly Byzantine—painted colossal fragments of a shattered torso, appallingly human; and gilded and silvered heaps of magnificence strewn among ruinous palms like the spoil of a barbarians' battle. There had been a massacre in the oasis—the Moor had been hurled headlong from his pedestal.

"He hit 'at ole lamidal statue," said George. "*Pow!*"

"My father?"

"*Yes*suh! *Pow!* he hit 'er! An' you' ma run tell me git doctuh quick 's I kin telefoam—she sho' you' pa goin' bus' a blood-vessel. He ain't takin' on 'tall *now*. He ain't nothin' 'tall to what he was 'while ago. You done miss it, Mist' Bibbs. Doctuh got him all quiet' down, to what he was. *Pow!* he hit 'er! Yessuh!" He took Bibbs's coat and proffered a crumpled telegraph form. "Here what come," he said. "I pick 'er up when he done stompin' on 'er. You read 'er, Mist' Bibbs—you' ma tell me tuhn 'er ovuh to you soon's you come in."

Bibbs read the telegram quickly. It was from New York and addressed to Mrs. Sheridan.

Sure you will all approve step have taken as was so wretched my health would probably suffered severely Robert and I were married this afternoon thought best have quiet wedding absolutely sure you will understand wisdom of step when you know Robert better am happiest woman in world are leaving for Florida will wire address when settled will remain till spring love to all father will like him too when knows him like I do he is just ideal.

EDITH LAMHORN.

CHAPTER XXV

GEORGE departed, and Bibbs was left gazing upon chaos and listening to thunder. He could not reach the stairway without passing the open doors of the library, and he was convinced that the mere glimpse of him, just then, would prove nothing less than insufferable for his father. For that reason he was about to make his escape into the gold-and-brocade room, intending to keep out of sight, when he heard Sheridan vociferously demanding his presence.

"Tell him to come in here! He's out there. I heard George just let him in. Now you'll *see!*" And tear-stained Mrs. Sheridan, looking out into the hall, beckoned to her son.

Bibbs went as far as the doorway. Gurney sat winding a strip of white cotton, his black bag open upon a chair near by; and Sheridan was striding up and down, his hand so heavily wrapped in fresh bandages that he seemed to be wearing a small boxing-glove. His eyes were bloodshot; his forehead was heavily bedewed; one side of his collar had broken loose, and there were blood-stains upon his right cuff.

"*There's* our little sunshine!" he cried, as Bibbs appeared. "*There's* the hope o' the family—my lifelong pride and joy! I want——"

"Keep your hand in that sling," said Gurney, sharply.

Sheridan turned upon him, uttering a sound like a howl. "For God's sake, sing another tune!" he cried. "You said you 'came as a doctor but stay as a friend,' and in that capacity you undertake to sit up and criticize *me*——"

"Oh, talk sense," said the doctor, and yawned intentionally. "What do you want Bibbs to say?"

"You were sittin' up there tellin' me I got 'hysterical'—'hysterical,' oh, Lord! You sat up there and told me I got 'hysterical' over nothin'! You sat up there tellin' me I didn't

have as heavy burdens as many another man you knew. I just want you to hear *this*. Now listen!" He swung toward the quiet figure waiting in the doorway. "Bibbs, will you come downtown with me Monday morning and let me start you with two vice-presidencies, a directorship, stock, and salaries? I ask you."

"No, father," said Bibbs, gently

Sheridan looked at Gurney and then faced his son once more.

"Bibbs, you want to stay in the shop, do you, at nine dollars a week, instead of takin' up my offer?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I'd like the doctor to hear: What'll you do if I decide you're too high-priced a workin'-man either to live in my house or work in my shop?'

"Find other work," said Bibbs.

"There! You hear him for yourself!" Sheridan cried. "You hear what——"

"Keep your hand in that sling! Yes, I hear him."

Sheridan leaned over Gurney and shouted, in a voice that cracked and broke, piping into falsetto: "He thinks of bein' a *plumber!* He wants to be a *plumber!* He told me he couldn't *think* if he went into business—he wants to be a plumber so he can *think!*"

He fell back a step, wiping his forehead with the back of his left hand. "There! That's my son! That's the only son I got now! That's my chance to live," he cried, with a bitterness that seemed to leave ashes in his throat. "That's my one chance to live—that thing you see in the doorway yonder!"

Dr. Gurney thoughtfully regarded the bandage strip he had been winding, and tossed it into the open bag. "What's the matter with giving Bibbs a chance to live?" he said, coolly. "I would if I were you. You've had *two* that went into business."

Sheridan's mouth moved grotesquely before he could speak. "Joe Gurney," he said, when he could command

himself so far, "are you accusin' me of the responsibility for the death of my son James?"

"I accuse you of nothing," said the doctor. "But just once I'd like to have it out with you on the question of Bibbs —and while he's here, too." He got up, walked to the fire, and stood warming his hands behind his back and smiling. "Look here, old fellow, let's be reasonable," he said. "You were bound Bibbs should go to the shop again, and I gave you and him, both, to understand pretty plainly that if he went it was at the risk of his life. Well, what did he do? He said he wanted to go. And he did go, and he's made good there. Now, see: Isn't that enough? Can't you let him off now? He wants to write, and how do you know that he couldn't do it if you gave him a chance? How do you know he hasn't some message—something to say that might make the world just a little bit happier or wiser? He *might*—in time —it's a possibility not to be denied. Now he can't deliver any message if he goes down there with you, and he won't *have* any to deliver. I don't say going down with you is likely to injure his health, as I thought the shop would, and as the shop did, the first time. I'm not speaking as doctor now, anyhow. But I tell you one thing I know: if you take him down there you'll kill something that I feel is in him, and it's finer, I think, than his physical body, and you'll kill it deader than a door-nail! And so why not let it live? You've about come to the end of your string, old fellow. Why not stop this perpetual devilish fighting and give Bibbs his chance?"

Sheridan stood looking at him fixedly. "What 'fighting'?"

"Yours—with nature." Gurney sustained the daunting gaze of his fierce antagonist equably. "You don't seem to understand that you've been struggling against actual law."

"What law?"

"Natural law," said Gurney. "What do you think beat you with Edith? Did Edith, herself, beat you? Didn't she obey without question something powerful that was against you? *Edith* wasn't against you, and you weren't against *her*,

but you set yourself against the power that had her in its grip, and it shot out a spurt of flame—and won in a walk! What's taken Roscoe from you? Timbers bear just so much strain, old man; but *you* wanted to send the load across the broken bridge, and you thought you could bully or coax the cracked thing into standing. Well, you couldn't! Now here's Bibbs. There are thousands of men fit for the life you want him to lead—and so is he. It wouldn't take half of Bibbs's brains to be twice as good a business man as Jim and Roscoe put together."

"*What!*" Sheridan goggled at him like a zany.

"Your son Bibbs," said the doctor, composedly, "Bibbs Sheridan has the kind and quantity of 'gray matter' that will make him a success in anything—if he ever wakes up! Personally I should prefer him to remain asleep. I like him that way. But the thousands of men fit for the life you want him to lead aren't fit to do much with the life he *ought* to lead. Blindly, he's been fighting for the chance to lead it—he's obeying something that begs to stay alive within him; and, blindly, he knows you'll crush it out. You've set your will to do it. Let me tell you something more. You don't know what you've become since Jim's going thwarted you—and that's what was uppermost, a bafflement stronger than your normal grief. You're half mad with a consuming fury against the very self of the law—for it was the very self of the law that took Jim from you. That was a law concerning the cohesion of molecules. The very self of the law took Roscoe from you and gave Edith the certainty of beating you; and the very self of the law makes Bibbs deny you to-night. The *law* beats you. Haven't you been whipped enough? But you want to whip the law—you've set yourself against it, to bend it to your own ends, to wield it and twist it——"

The voice broke from Sheridan's heaving chest in a shout. "Yes! And by God, I will!"

"So Ajax defied the lightning," said Gurney.

"I've heard that dam'-fool story, too," Sheridan retorted, fiercely. "That's for chuldern and niggers. It ain't twentieth

century, let me tell you! 'Defied the lightning,' did he, the jackass! If he'd been half a man he'd 'a' got away with it. *We* don't go showin' off defyin' the lightning—we hitch it up and make it work for us like a black steer! A man nowadays would just as soon think o' defyin' a wood-shed!"

"Well, what about Bibbs?" said Gurney. "Will you be a really big man now and——"

"Gurney, you know a lot about bigness!" Sheridan began to walk to and fro again, and the doctor returned gloomily to his chair. He had shot his bolt the moment he judged its chance to strike centre was best, but the target seemed unaware of the marksman.

"I'm tryin' to make a big man out o' that poor truck yonder," Sheridan went on, "and you step in, beggin' me to let him be Lord knows what—*I* don't! I suppose you figure it out that now I got a *son-in-law*, I mightn't need a son! Yes, I got a son-in-law—now a spender!"

"Oh, put your hand back!" said Gurney, wearily.

There was a bronze inkstand upon the table. Sheridan put his right hand in the sling, but with his left he swept the inkstand from the table and halfway across the room—a comet with a destroying black tail. Mrs. Sheridan shrieked and sprang toward it.

"Let it lay!" he shouted, fiercely. "Let it lay!" And, weeping, she obeyed. "Yes, sir," he went on, in a voice more the ominous for the sudden hush he put upon it. "I got a spender for a son-in-law! It's wonderful where property goes, sometimes. There was ole man Tracy—you remember him, Doc—J. R. Tracy, solid banker. He went into the bank as messenger, seventeen years old; he was president at forty-three, and he built that bank with his life for forty years more. He was down there from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon the day before he died—over eighty! Gilt edge, that bank? It was diamond edge! He used to eat a bag o' peanuts and an apple for lunch; but he wasn't stingy—he was just livin' in his business. He didn't care for pie or automobiles—he had his bank. It was an institution, and it come

pretty near bein' the beatin' heart o' this town in its time. Well, that ole man used to pass one o' these here turned-up-nose and turned-up-pants cigarette boys on the streets. Never spoke to him, Tracy didn't. Speak to him? God! he wouldn't 'a' coughed on him! He wouldn't 'a' let him clean the cuspidors at the bank! Why, if he'd 'a' just seen him standin' in *front* the bank he'd 'a' had him run off the street. And yet all Tracy was doin' every day of his life was workin' for that cigarette boy! Tracy thought it was for the bank; he thought he was givin' his life and his life-blood and the blood of his brain for the bank, but he wasn't. It was every bit—from the time he went in at seventeen till he died in harness at eighty-three—it was every last lick of it just slavin' for that turned-up-nose, turned-up-pants cigarette boy. *And Tracy didn't even know his name!* He died, not ever havin' heard it, though he chased him off the front steps of his house once. The day after Tracy died his old-maid daughter married the cigarette—and there *ain't* any Tracy bank any more! It didn't take that old spider Shelby three years to get it away from the cigarette! And now"—his voice rose again—"and now *I* got a cigarette son-in-law!"

Gurney pointed to the flourishing right hand without speaking, and Sheridan once more returned it to the sling.

"My son-in-law likes Florida this winter," Sheridan went on. "That's good, and my son-in-law better enjoy it, because I don't think he'll be there next winter. They got twelve thousand dollars to spend, and I hear it can be done in Florida by rich sons-in-law. When Roscoe's woman got me to spend that much on a porch for their new house, Edith wouldn't give me a minute's rest till I turned over the same to her. And she's got it, besides what I gave her to go East on. It'll be gone long before this time next year, and when she comes home and leaves the cigarette behind—for good—she'll get some more. *My* name ain't Tracy, and there ain't goin' to be any Tracy business in the Sheridan family. And there ain't goin' to be any college foundin' and endowin' and trusteein', nor God-knows-what to keep my property alive

when I'm gone! Edith 'll be back, and she'll get a girl's share when she's through with that cigarette, but——"

"By the way," interposed Gurney, "didn't Mrs. Sheridan tell me that Bibbs warned you Edith would marry Lamhorn in New York?"

Sheridan went completely to pieces: he swore, while his wife screamed and stopped her ears. And as he swore he pounded the table with his wounded hand, and when the doctor, after storming at him ineffectively, sprang to catch and protect that hand, Sheridan wrenched it away, tearing the bandage. He hammered the table till it leaped.

"Fool!" he panted, choking. "If he's shown gumption enough to guess right the first time in his life, it's enough for me to begin learnin' him on!" And, struggling with the doctor, he leaned toward Bibbs, thrusting forward his convulsed face, which was deathly pale. "My name ain't Tracy, I tell you!" he screamed, hoarsely. "You give in, you stubborn fool! I've had my way with you before, and I'll have my way with you now!"

Bibbs's face was as white as his father's, but he kept remembering that "splendid look" of Mary's which he had told her would give him courage in a struggle, so that he would "never give up."

"No. You can't have your way," he said. And then, obeying a significant motion of Gurney's head, he went out quickly, leaving them struggling.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. SHERIDAN, in a wrapper, noiselessly opened the door of her husband's room at daybreak the next morning, and peered within the darkened chamber. At the "old" house they had shared a room, but the architect had chosen to separate them at the New, and they had not known how to formulate an objection, although to both of them something seemed vaguely reprehensible in the new arrangement.

Sheridan did not stir, and she was withdrawing her head from the aperture when he spoke.

"Oh, I'm *awake!* Come in, if you want to, and shut the door."

She came and sat by the bed. "I woke up thinkin' about it," she explained. "And the more I thought about it the surer I got I must be right, and I knew you'd be tormentin' yourself if you was awake, so—— Well, you got plenty other troubles, but I'm just sure you ain't goin' to have the worry with Bibbs it looks like."

"You *bet* I ain't!" he grunted.

"Look how biddable he was about goin' back to the Works," she continued. "He's a right good-hearted boy, really, and sometimes I honestly have to say he seems right smart, too. Now and then he'll say something sounds right bright. 'Course, most always it doesn't, and a good deal of the time, when he says things, why, I have to feel glad we haven't got company, because they'd think he didn't have any gumption at all. Yet, look at the way he did when Jim —when Jim got hurt. He took right hold o' things. 'Course he'd been sick himself so much and all—and the rest of us never had, much, and we were kind o' green about what to do in that kind o' trouble—still, he did take hold, and every-

thing went off all right; you'll have to say that much, papa. And Dr. Gurney says he's got brains, and you can't deny but what the doctor's right considerable of a man. He acts sleepy, but that's only because he's got such a large practice —he's a pretty wide-awake kind of a man some ways. Well, what he says last night about Bibbs himself bein' asleep, and how much he'd amount to if he ever woke up—that's what I got to thinkin' about. You heard him, papa; he says, 'Bibbs'll be a bigger business man than what Jim and Roscoe was put together—if he ever wakes up,' he says. Wasn't that exactly what he says?"

"I suppose so," said Sheridan, without exhibiting any interest. "Gurney's crazier 'n Bibbs, but if he wasn't—if what he says was true—what of it?"

"Listen, papa. Just suppose Bibbs took it into his mind to get married. You know where he goes all the time——"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" Sheridan turned over in the bed, his face to the wall, leaving visible of himself only the thick grizzle of his hair. "You better go back to sleep. He runs over there—every minute she'll let him, I suppose. Go back to bed. There's nothin' in it."

"*Why* ain't there?" she urged. "I know better—there is, too! You wait and see. There's just one thing in the world that'll wake the sleepiest young man alive up—yes, and make him *jump* up—and I don't care who he is or how sound asleep it looks like he is. That's when he takes it into his head to pick out some girl and settle down and have a home and chuldern of his own. *Then*, I guess, he'll go out after the money! You'll see, I've known dozens o' cases, and so've you—moony, no-'count young men, all notions, and talk, goin' to be ministers, maybe, or something; and there's just this one thing takes it out of 'em and brings 'em right down to business. Well, I never could make out just what it is Bibbs wants to be, really; doesn't seem he wants to be a minister exactly—he's so far-away you can't tell, and he never *says* —but I know this is goin' to get him right down to common sense. Now, I don't say that Bibbs has got the idea in his

head yet—'r else he wouldn't be talkin' that fool-talk about nine dollars a week bein' good enough for him to live on. But it's *comin'*, papa, and he'll *jump* for whatever you want to hand him out. He will! And I can tell you this much, too: he'll want all the salary and stock he can get hold of, and he'll hustle to keep gettin' more. That girl's the kind that a young husband just goes crazy to give things to! She's pretty and fine-lookin', and things look nice on her, and I guess she'd like to have 'em about as well as the next. And I guess she isn't gettin' many these days, either, and she'll be pretty ready for the change. I saw her with her sleeves rolled up at the kitchen window the other day, and Jackson told me yesterday their cook left two weeks ago, and they haven't tried to hire another one. He says her and her mother been doin' the housework a good while, and now they're doin' the cookin', too. 'Course Bibbs wouldn't know that unless she's told him, and I reckon she wouldn't; she's kind o' stiffish-lookin', and Bibbs is too up in the clouds to notice anything like that for himself. They've never asked him to a meal in the house, but he wouldn't notice that, either—he's kind of innocent. Now I was thinkin'—you know, I don't suppose we've hardly mentioned the girl's name at table since Jim went, but it seems to me maybe if——"

Sheridan flung out his arms, uttering a sound half-groan, half-yawn. "You're barkin' up the wrong tree! Go on back to bed, mamma!"

"Why am I?" she demanded, crossly. "Why am I barkin' up the wrong tree?"

"Because you are. There's nothin' in it."

"I'll bet you," she said, rising—"I'll bet you he goes to church with her this morning. What you want to bet?"

"Go back to bed," he commanded. "I *know* what I'm talkin' about; there's nothin' in it, I tell you."

She shook her head perplexedly. "You think because—because Jim was runnin' so much with her it wouldn't look right?"

"No. Nothin' to do with it."

"Then—do you know something about it that you ain't told me?"

"Yes, I do," he grunted. "Now go on. Maybe I can get a little sleep. I ain't had any yet!"

"Well——" She went to the door, her expression downcast. "I thought maybe—but——" She coughed prefatorily. "Oh, papa, something else I wanted to tell you. I was talkin' to Roscoe over the 'phone last night when the telegram came, so I forgot to tell you, but—well, Sibyl wants to come over this afternoon. Roscoe says she has something she wants to say to us. It'll be the first time she's been out since she was able to sit up—and I reckon she wants to tell us she's sorry for what happened. They expect to get off by the end o' the week, and I reckon she wants to feel she's done what she could to kind o' make up. Anyway, that's what he said. I 'phoned him again about Edith, and he said it wouldn't disturb Sibyl, because she'd been expectin' it; she was sure all along it was goin' to happen; and, besides, I guess she's got all that foolishness pretty much out of her, bein' so sick. But what I thought was, no use bein' rough with her, papa—I expect she's suffered a good deal—and I don't think we'd ought to be, on Roscoe's account. You'll—you'll be kind o' polite to her, won't you, papa?"

He mumbled something which was smothered under the coverlet he had pulled over his head.

"What?" she said, timidly. "I was just sayin' I hoped you'd treat Sibyl all right when she comes, this afternoon. You will, won't you, papa?"

He threw the coverlet off furiously. "I presume so!" he roared.

She departed guiltily.

But if he had accepted her proffered wager that Bibbs would go to church with Mary Vertrees that morning, Mrs. Sheridan would have lost. Nevertheless, Bibbs and Mary did certainly set out from Mr. Vertrees's house with the purpose of going to church. That was their intention, and they had no other. They meant to go to church.

But it happened that they were attentively preoccupied in a conversation as they came to the church; and though Mary was looking to the right and Bibbs was looking to the left, Bibbs's leftward glance converged with Mary's rightward glance, and neither was looking far beyond the other at this time. It also happened that, though they were a little jostled among groups of people in the vicinity of the church, they passed this somewhat prominent edifice without being aware of their proximity to it, and they had gone an incredible number of blocks beyond it before they discovered their error. However, feeling that they might be embarrassingly late if they returned, they decided that a walk would make them as good. It was a windless winter morning, with an inch of crisp snow over the ground. So they walked, and for the most part they were silent, but on their way home, after they had turned back at noon, they began to be talkative again.

"Mary," said Bibbs, after a time, "am I a sleep-walker?"

She laughed a little, then looked grave. "Does your father say you are?"

"Yes—when he's in a mood to flatter me. Other times, other names. He has quite a list."

"You mustn't mind," she said, gently. "He's been getting some pretty severe shocks. What you've told me makes me pretty sorry for him, Bibbs. I've always been sure he's very big."

"Yes. Big and—blind. He's like a Hercules without eyes and without any consciousness except that of his strength and of his purpose to grow stronger. Stronger for what? For nothing."

"Are you sure, Bibbs? It *can't* be for nothing; it must be stronger for something, even though he doesn't know what it is. Perhaps what he and his kind are struggling for is something so great they *couldn't* see it—so great none of us could see it."

"No, he's just like some blind, unconscious thing heaving underground——"

"Till he breaks through and leaps out into the daylight," she finished for him, cheerily.

"Into the smoke," said Bibbs. "Look at the powder of coal-dust already dirtying the decent snow, even though it's Sunday. That's from the little pigs; the big ones aren't so bad, on Sunday! There's a fleck of soot on your cheek. Some pig sent it out into the air; he might as well have thrown it on you. It would have been braver, for then he'd have taken his chance of my whipping him for it if I could."

"*Is* there soot on my cheek, Bibbs, or were you only saying so rhetorically? *Is* there?"

"Is there? There *are* soot on your cheeks, Mary—a fleck on each. One landed since I mentioned the first."

She halted immediately, giving him her handkerchief, and he succeeded in transferring most of the black from her face to the cambric. They were entirely matter-of-course about it.

An elderly couple, it chanced, had been walking behind Bibbs and Mary for the last block or so, and passed ahead during the removal of the soot. "There!" said the elderly wife. "You're always wrong when you begin guessing about strangers. Those two young people aren't honeymooners at all—they've been married for years. A blind man could see that."

"I wish I did know who threw that soot on you," said Bibbs, looking up at the neighbouring chimneys, as they went on. "They arrest children for throwing snowballs at the street-cars, but——"

"But they don't arrest the street-cars for shaking all the pictures in the houses crooked every time they go by. Nor for the uproar they make. I wonder what's the cost in nerves for the noise of the city each year. Yes, we pay the price for living in a 'growing town,' whether we have money to pay or none."

"Who is it gets the pay?" said Bibbs.

"Not I?" she laughed.

"Nobody gets it. There isn't any pay; there's only money. And only some of the men downtown get much of that. That's what my father wants me to get."

"Yes," she said, smiling to him, and nodding. "And you don't want it, and you don't need it."

"But you don't think I'm a sleep-walker, Mary?" He had told her of his father's new plans for him, though he had not described the vigour and picturesqueness of their setting forth. "You think I'm right?"

"A thousand times!" she cried. "There aren't so many happy people in this world, I think—and you say you've found what makes you happy. If it's a dream—keep it!"

"The thought of going down there—into the money shuffle—I hate it as I never hated the shop!" he said. "I hate it! And the city itself, the city that the money shuffle has made—just look at it! Look at it in winter. The snow's tried hard to make the ugliness bearable, but the ugliness is winning; it's making the snow hideous; the snow's getting dirty on top, and it's foul underneath with the dirt and disease of the unclean street. And the dirt and the ugliness and the rush and the noise aren't the worst of it; it's what the dirt and ugliness and rush and noise *mean*—that's the worst! The outward things are insufferable, but they're only the expression of a spirit—a blind embryo of a spirit, not yet a soul—oh, just greed! And this 'go ahead' nonsense! Oughtn't it all to be a fellowship? I shouldn't want to get ahead if I could—I'd want to help the other fellow to keep up with me."

"I read something the other day and remembered it for you," said Mary. "It was something Burne-Jones said of a picture he was going to paint: 'In the first picture I shall make a man walking in the street of a great city, full of all kinds of happy life: children, and lovers walking, and ladies leaning from windows all down great lengths of street leading to the city walls; and there the gates are wide open, letting in a space of green field and corn-field in harvest; and

all round his head a great rain of swirling autumn leaves blowing from a little walled graveyard.'"

"And if I painted," Bibbs returned, "I'd paint a lady walking in the street of a great city, full of all kinds of uproarious and futile life—children being taught only how to make money, and lovers hurrying to get richer, and ladies who'd given up trying to wash their windows clean, and the gates of the city wide open, letting in slums and slaughter-houses and freight-yards, and all around this lady's head a great rain of swirling soot——" He paused, adding, thoughtfully: "And yet I believe I'm glad that soot got on your cheek. It was just as if I were your brother—the way you gave me your handkerchief to rub it off for you. Still, Edith never——"

"Didn't she?" said Mary, as he paused again.

"No. And I——" He contented himself with shaking his head instead of offering more definite information. Then he realized that they were passing the New House, and he sighed profoundly. "Mary, our walk's almost over."

She looked as blank. "So it is, Bibbs."

They said no more until they came to her gate. As they drifted slowly to a stop, the door of Roscoe's house opened, and Roscoe came out with Sibyl, who was startlingly pale. She seemed little enfeebled by her illness, however, walking rather quickly at her husband's side and not taking his arm. The two crossed the street without appearing to see Mary and her companion, and, entering the New House, were lost to sight. Mary gazed after them gravely, but Bibbs, looking at Mary, did not see them.

"Mary," he said, "you seem very serious. Is anything bothering you?"

"No, Bibbs." And she gave him a bright, quick look that made him instantly unreasonably happy.

"I know you want to go in——" he began.

"No. I don't want to."

"I mustn't keep you standing here, and I mustn't go in

with you—but—I just wanted to say—I've seemed very stupid to myself this morning, grumbling about soot and all that—while all the time I—Mary, I think it's been the very happiest of all the hours you've given me. I do. And—I don't know just why—but it's seemed to me that it was one I'd always remember. And you," he added, falteringly, "you look so—so beautiful to-day!"

"It must have been the soot on my cheek, Bibbs."

"Mary, will you tell me something?" he asked.

"I think I will."

"It's something I've had a lot of theories about, but none of them ever just fits. You used to wear furs in the fall, but now it's so much colder, you don't—you never wear them at all any more. Why don't you?"

Her eyes fell for a moment, and she grew red. Then she looked up gaily. "Bibbs, if I tell you the answer, will you promise not to ask any more questions?"

"Yes. Why did you stop wearing them?"

"Because I found I'd be warmer without them!" She caught his hand quickly in her own for an instant, laughed into his eyes, and ran into the house.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT IS the consoling attribute of unused books that their decorative warmth will so often make even a ready-made library the actual "living-room" of a family to whom the shelved volumes are indeed sealed. Thus it was with Sheridan, who read nothing except newspapers, business letters, and figures; who looked upon books as he looked upon bric-à-brac or crocheting—when he was at home, and not abed or eating, he was in the library.

He stood in the many-coloured light of the stained-glass window at the far end of the long room, when Roscoe and his wife came in, and he exhaled a solemnity. His deference to the Sabbath was manifest, as always, in the length of his coat and the closeness of his Saturday-night shave; and his expression, to match this religious pomp, was more than Sabbatical, but the most dismaying of his demonstrations was his keeping his hand in his sling.

Sibyl advanced to the middle of the room and halted there, not looking at him, but down at her muff, in which, it could be seen, her hands were nervously moving. Roscoe went to a chair in another part of the room. There was a deadly silence.

But Sibyl found a shaky voice, after an interval of gulping, though she was unable to lift her eyes, and the darkling lids continued to veil them. She spoke hurriedly, like an ungifted child reciting something committed to memory, but her sincerity was none the less evident for that.

"Father Sheridan, you and mother Sheridan have always been so kind to me, and I would hate to have you think I don't appreciate it, from the way I acted. I've come to tell you I am sorry for the way I did that night, and to say I know as well as anybody the way I behaved, and it will

never happen again, because it's been a pretty hard lesson; and when we come back, some day, I hope you'll see that you've got a daughter-in-law you never need to be ashamed of again. I want to ask you to excuse me for the way I did, and I can say I haven't any feelings toward Edith now, but only wish her happiness and good in her new life. I thank you for all your kindness to me, and I know I made a poor return for it, but if you can overlook the way I behaved I know I would feel a good deal happier—and I know Roscoe would, too. I wish to promise not to be as foolish in the future, and the same error would never occur again to make us all so unhappy, if you can be charitable enough to excuse it this time."

He looked steadily at her without replying, and she stood before him, never lifting her eyes; motionless, save where the moving fur proved the agitation of her hands within the muff.

"All right," he said, at last.

She looked up then with vast relief, though there was a revelation of heavy tears when the eyelids lifted.

"Thank you," she said. "There's something else—about something different—I want to say to you, but I want mother Sheridan to hear it, too."

"She's upstairs in her room," said Sheridan. "Roscoe——"

Sibyl interrupted. She had just seen Bibbs pass through the hall and begin to ascend the stairs; and in a flash she instinctively perceived the chance for precisely the effect she wanted.

"No, let me go," she said. "I want to speak to her a minute first, anyway."

And she went away quickly, gaining the top of the stairs in time to see Bibbs enter his room and close the door. Sibyl knew that Bibbs, in his room, had overheard her quarrel with Edith in the hall outside; for bitter Edith, thinking the more to shame her, had subsequently informed her of the circumstance. Sibyl had just remembered this, and with the recol-

lection there had flashed the thought—out of her own experience—that people are often much more deeply impressed by words they overhear than by words directly addressed to them. Sibyl intended to make it impossible for Bibbs not to overhear. She did not hesitate—her heart was hot with the old sore, and she believed wholly in the justice of her cause and in the truth of what she was going to say. Fate was virtuous at times; it had delivered into her hands the girl who had affronted her.

Mrs. Sheridan was in her own room. The approach of Sibyl and Roscoe had driven her from the library, for she had miscalculated her husband's mood, and she felt that if he used his injured hand as a mark of emphasis again, in her presence, she would (as she thought of it) "have a fit right there." She heard Sibyl's step, and pretended to be putting a touch to her hair before a mirror.

"I was just coming down," she said, as the door opened.

"Yes, he wants you to," said Sibyl. "It's all right, mother Sheridan. He's forgiven me."

Mrs. Sheridan sniffed instantly; tears appeared. She kissed her daughter-in-law's cheek; then, in silence, regarded the mirror afresh, wiped her eyes, and applied powder.

"And I hope Edith will be happy," Sibyl added, inciting more applications of Mrs. Sheridan's handkerchief and powder.

"Yes, yes," murmured the good woman. "We mustn't make the worst of things."

"Well, there was something else I had to say, and he wants to hear it, too," said Sibyl. "We better go down, mother Sheridan."

She led the way, Mrs. Sheridan following obediently, but, when they came to a spot close by Bibbs's door, Sibyl stopped. "I want to tell you about it first," she said, abruptly. "It isn't a secret, of course, in any way; it's something the whole family has to know, and the sooner the whole family knows it the better. It's something it wouldn't be *right* for us *all* not to understand, and of course father Sheridan most of all.

But I want to just kind of go over it first with you; it'll kind of help me to see I got it all straight. I haven't got any reason for saying it except the good of the family, and it's nothing to me, one way or the other, of course, except for that. I oughtn't to 've behaved the way I did that night, and it seems to me if there's anything I can do to help the family, I ought to, because it would help show I felt the right way. Well, what I want to do is to tell this so's to keep the family from being made a fool of. I don't want to see the family just made use of and twisted around her finger by somebody that's got no more heart than so much ice, and just as sure to bring troubles in the long run as—as Edith's mistake is. Well, then, this is the way it is. I'll just tell you how it looks to me and see if it don't strike you the same way."

Within the room, Bibbs, much annoyed, tapped his ear with his pencil. He wished they wouldn't stand talking near his door when he was trying to write. He had just taken from his trunk the manuscript of a poem begun the preceding Sunday afternoon, and he had some ideas he wanted to fix upon paper before they maliciously seized the first opportunity to vanish, for they were but gossamer. Bibbs was pleased with the beginnings of his poem, and if he could carry it through he meant to dare greatly with it—he would venture it upon an editor. For he had his plan of life now: his day would be of manual labour and thinking—he could think of his friend and he could think in cadences of poems, to the crashing of the strong machines—and if his father turned him out of home and out of the Works, he would work elsewhere and live elsewhere. His father had the right, and it mattered very little to Bibbs—he faced the prospect of a working-man's lodging-house without trepidation. He could find a wash-stand to write upon, he thought; and every evening when he left Mary he would write a little; and he would write on holidays and on Sundays—on Sundays in the afternoon. In a lodging-house at least he wouldn't be interrupted by his sister-in-law's choosing the immediate vicinity of his door for conversations evidently important to herself, but merely disturbing to him.

He frowned plaintively, wishing he could think of some polite way of asking her to go away. But, as she went on, he started violently, dropping manuscript and pencil upon the floor.

"I don't know whether you heard it, mother Sheridan," she said, "but this old Vertrees house, next door, has been sold on foreclosure, and all *they* got out of it was an agreement that lets 'em live there a little longer. Roscoe told me, and he says he heard Mr. Vertrees has been up and down the streets more 'n two years, tryin' to get a job he could call a 'position,' and couldn't land it. You heard anything about it, mother Sheridan?"

"Well, I *did* know they been doin' their own housework a good while back," said Mrs. Sheridan. "And now they're doin' the cookin', too."

Sibyl sent forth a little titter with a sharp edge. "I hope they find something to cook! She sold her piano mighty quick after Jim died!"

Bibbs jumped up. He was trembling from head to foot and he was dizzy—of all the real things he could never have dreamed in his dream the last would have been what he heard now. He felt that something incredible was happening, and that he was powerless to stop it. It seemed to him that heavy blows were falling upon his head and upon Mary's; it seemed to him that he and Mary were being struck and beaten physically—and that something hideous impended. He wanted to shout to Sibyl to be silent, but he could not; he could only stand, swallowing and trembling.

"What I think the whole family ought to understand is just this," said Sibyl, sharply. "Those people were so hard up that this Miss Vertrees started after Bibbs before they knew whether he was *insane* or not! They'd got a notion he might be, from his being in a sanitarium, and Mrs. Vertrees *asked* me if he was insane, the very first day Bibbs took the daughter out auto-riding!" She paused a moment, looking at Mrs. Sheridan, but listening intently. There was no sound from within the room.

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheridan.

"It's the truth," Sibyl declared, loudly. "Oh, of course we were all crazy about that girl at first. We were pretty green when we moved up here, and we thought she'd get us *in*—but it didn't take *me* long to read her! Her family were down and out when it came to money—and they had to go after it, one way or another, *somehow!* So she started for Roscoe; but she found out pretty quick he was married, and she turned right around to Jim—and she landed him! There's no doubt about it, she had Jim, and if he'd lived you'd had another daughter-in-law before this, as sure as I stand here telling you the God's truth about it! Well—when Jim was left in the cemetery she was waiting out there to drive home with Bibbs! Jim wasn't *cold*—and she didn't know whether Bibbs was insane or not, but he was the only one of the rich Sheridan boys left. She had to get him."

The texture of what was the truth made an even fabric with what was not, in Sibyl's mind; she believed every word that she uttered, and she spoke with the rapidity and vehemence of fierce conviction.

"What I feel about it is," she said, "it oughtn't to be allowed to go on. It's too mean! I like poor Bibbs, and I don't want to see him made such a fool of, and I don't want to see the family made such a fool of! I like poor Bibbs, but if he'd only stop to think a minute himself he'd have to realize he isn't the kind of a man *any* girl would be apt to fall in love with. He's better-looking lately, maybe, but you know how he *was*—just kind of a long white rag in good clothes. And girls like men with some *go* to 'em—*some* sort of dashingness, anyhow! Nobody ever looked at poor Bibbs before, and neither'd she—no, *sir!* not till she'd tried both Roscoe and Jim first! It was only when her and her family got desperate that she——"

Bibbs—whiter than when he came from the sanitarium—opened the door. He stepped across its threshold and stood looking at her. Both women screamed.

"Oh, good heavens!" cried Sibyl. "Were you in *there?* Oh, I wouldn't——" She seized Mrs. Sheridan's arm, pulling

her toward the stairway. "Come on, mother Sheridan!" she urged, and as the befuddled and confused lady obeyed, Sibyl left a trail of noisy exclamations: "Good gracious! Oh, I wouldn't—— Too bad! I didn't *dream* he was there! I wouldn't hurt his feelings! Not for the world! Of course he had to know *some* time! But, good heavens——"

She heard his door close as she and Mrs. Sheridan reached the top of the stairs, and she glanced over her shoulder quickly, but Bibbs was not following; he had gone back into his room.

"He—he looked—oh, terrible bad!" stammered Mrs. Sheridan. "I—I wish——"

"Still, it's a good deal better he knows about it," said Sibyl. "I shouldn't wonder it might turn out the very best thing could happened. Come on!"

And completing their descent to the library, the two made their appearance to Roscoe and his father. Sibyl at once gave a full and truthful account of what had taken place, repeating her own remarks, and omitting only the fact that it was through her design that Bibbs had overheard them.

"But as I told mother Sheridan," she said, in conclusion, "it might turn out for the very best that he did hear—just that way. Don't you think so, father Sheridan?"

He merely grunted in reply, and sat rubbing the thick hair on the top of his head with his left hand and looking at the fire. He had given no sign of being impressed in any manner by her exposure of Mary Vertrees's character; but his impassivity did not dismay Sibyl—it was Bibbs whom she desired to impress, and she was content in that matter.

"I'm sure it was all for the best," she said. "It's over now, and he knows what she is. In one way I think it was lucky, because, just hearing a thing that way, a person can tell it's *so*—and he knows *I* haven't got any ax to grind except his own good and the good of the family."

Mrs. Sheridan went nervously to the door and stood there, looking toward the stairway. "I wish—I wish I knew what he was doin'," she said. "He did look terrible bad. It was like

something had been done to him that was—I don't know what. I never saw anybody look like he did. He looked—so queer. It was like you'd——" She called down the hall, "George!"

"Yes'm?"

"Were you up in Mr. Bibbs's room just now?"

"Yes'm. He ring bell; tole me make him fiah in his grate. I done buil' him nice fiah. I reckon he ain' feelin' so well. Yes'm." He departed.

"What do you expect he wants a fire for?" she asked, turning toward her husband. "The house is warm as can be. I do wish I——"

"Oh, quit frettin'!" said Sheridan.

"Well, I—I kind o' wish you hadn't said anything, Sibyl. I know you meant it for the best and all, but I don't believe it would been so much harm if——"

"Mother Sheridan, you don't mean you *want* that kind of a girl in the family? Why, she——"

"I don't know, I don't know," the troubled woman quavered. "If he liked her it seems kind of a pity to spoil it. He's so queer, and he hasn't ever taken much enjoyment. And besides, I believe the way it was, there was more chance of him bein' willin' to do what papa wants him to. If she wants to marry him——"

Sheridan interrupted her with a hooting laugh. "She don't!" he said. "You're barkin' up the wrong tree, Sibyl. She ain't that kind of a girl."

"But, father Sheridan, didn't she——"

He cut her short. "That's enough. You may mean all right, but you guess wrong. So do you, mamma."

Sibyl cried out. "Oh! But just *look* how she ran after Jim——"

"She did not," he said, curtly. "She wouldn't take Jim. She turned him down cold."

"But that's impossi——"

"It's not. I *know* she did."

Sibyl looked flatly incredulous.

"And *you* needn't worry," he said, turning to his wife. "This won't have any effect on your idea, because there wasn't any sense to it, anyhow. D'you think she'd be very likely to take Bibbs—after she wouldn't take *Jim?* She's a good-hearted girl, and she lets Bibbs come to see her, but if she'd ever given him one sigh of encouragement the way you women think, he wouldn't of acted the stubborn fool he has—he'd 'a' been at me long ago, beggin' me for some kind of a job he could support a wife on. There's nothin' in it—and I've got the same old fight with him on my hands I've had all his life—and the Lord knows what he won't do to balk me! What's happened now 'll probably only make him twice as stubborn, but——"

"*'Sh!*" Mrs. Sheridan, still in the doorway, lifted her hand. "That's his step—he's comin' downstairs." She shrank away from the door as if she feared to have Bibbs see her. "I—I wonder—" she said, almost in a whisper—"I wonder what he's goin'—to do."

Her timorousness had its effect upon the others. Sheridan rose, frowning, but remained standing beside his chair; and Roscoe moved toward Sibyl, who stared uneasily at the open doorway. They listened as the slow steps descended the stairs and came toward the library.

Bibbs stopped upon the threshold, and with sick and haggard eyes looked slowly from one to the other until at last his gaze rested upon his father. Then he came and stood before him.

"I'm sorry you've had so much trouble with me," he said, gently. "You won't, any more. I'll take the job you offered me."

Sheridan did not speak—he stared, astounded and incredulous; and Bibbs had left the room before any of its occupants uttered a sound, though he went as slowly as he came. Mrs. Sheridan was the first to move. She went nervously back to the doorway, and then out into the hall. Bibbs had gone from the house.

Bibbs's mother had a feeling about him then that she had

never known before; it was indefinite and vague, but very poignant—something in her mourned for him uncomprehendingly. She felt that an awful thing had been done to him, though she did not know what it was. She went up to his room.

The fire George had built for him was almost smothered under thick charred ashes of paper. The lid of his trunk stood open, and the large upper tray, which she remembered to have seen full of papers and note-books, was empty. And somehow she understood that Bibbs had given up the mysterious vocation he had hoped to follow—and that he had given it up forever. She thought it was the wisest thing he could have done —and yet, for an unknown reason, she sat upon the bed and wept a little before she went downstairs.

So Sheridan had his way with Bibbs, all through.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS BIBBS came out of the New House, a Sunday trio was in course of passage upon the sidewalk: an ample young woman, placid of face; a black-clad, thin young man, whose expression was one of habitual anxiety, habitual wariness, and habitual eagerness. He propelled a perambulator containing the third—and all three were newly cleaned, Sundayfied, and made fit to dine with the wife's relatives.

"How'd you like for me to be *that* young fella, mamma?" the husband whispered. "He's one of the sons, and there ain't but two left now."

The wife stared curiously at Bibbs. "Well, I don't know," she returned. "He looks to me like he had his own troubles."

"I expect he has, like anybody else," said the young husband, "but I guess we could stand a good deal if we had his money."

"Well, maybe, if you keep on the way you been, baby'll be as well fixed as the Sheridans. You can't tell." She glanced back at Bibbs, who had turned north. "He walks kind of slow and stooped over, like."

"So much money in his pockets it makes him sag, I guess," said the young husband, with bitter admiration.

Mary, happening to glance from a window, saw Bibbs coming, and she started, clasping her hands together in a sudden alarm. She met him at the door.

"Bibbs!" she cried. "What is the matter? I saw something was terribly wrong when I—— You look——" She paused, and he came in, not lifting his eyes to hers. Always when he crossed that threshold he had come with his head up and his wistful gaze seeking hers. "Ah, poor boy!" she said, with a gesture of understanding and pity. "I know what it is!"

He followed her into the room where they always sat, and sank into a chair.

"You needn't tell me," she said. "They've made you give up. Your father's won—you're going to do what he wants. You've given up."

Still without looking at her, he inclined his head in affirmation.

She gave a little cry of compassion, and came and sat near him. "Bibbs," she said, "I can be glad of one thing, though it's selfish. I can be glad you came straight to me. It's more to me than even if you'd come because you were happy." She did not speak again for a little while; then she said: "Bibbs—dear—could you tell me about it? Do you want to?"

Still he did not look up, but in a voice, shaken and husky, he asked her a question so grotesque that at first she thought she had misunderstood his words.

"Mary," he said, "could you marry me?"

"What did you say, Bibbs?" she asked, quietly.

His tone and attitude did not change. "Will you marry me?"

Both of her hands leaped to her cheeks—she grew red and then white. She rose slowly and moved backward from him, staring at him, at first incredulously, then with an intense perplexity more and more luminous in her wide eyes; it was like a spoken question. The room filled with strangeness in the long silence—the two were so strange to each other. At last she said:

"What made you say that?"

He did not answer.

"Bibbs, look at me!" Her voice was loud and clear. "What made you say that? Look at me!"

He could not look at her, and he could not speak.

"What was it that made you?" she said. "I want you to tell me."

She went closer to him, her eyes ever brighter and wider with that intensity of wonder "You've given up—to your father," she said, slowly, "and then you came to ask me——" She broke off "Bibbs, do you want me to marry you?"

"Yes," he said, just audibly.

"No!" she cried. "You do not. Then what made you ask me? What is it that's happened?"

"Nothing."

"Wait," she said. "Let me think. It's something that happened since our walk this morning—yes, since you left me at noon. Something happened that——" She stopped abruptly with a tremulous murmur of amazement and dawning comprehension. She remembered that Sibyl had gone to the New House.

Bibbs swallowed painfully and contrived to say, "I do—I do want you to—marry me, if—if—you could."

She looked at him, and slowly shook her head. "Bibbs, do you——" Her voice was as unsteady as his—little more than a whisper. "Do you think I'm—in love with you?"

"No," he said.

Somewhere in the still air of the room there was a whispered word; it did not seem to come from Mary's parted lips, but he was aware of it. "Why?"

"I've had nothing but dreams," Bibbs said, desolately, "but they weren't like that. Sibyl said no girl could care about me." He smiled faintly, though still he did not look at Mary. "And when I first came home Edith told me Sibyl was so anxious to marry that she'd have married *me*. She meant it to express Sibyl's extremity, you see. But I hardly needed either of them to tell me. I hadn't thought of myself as—well, not as particularly captivating!"

Oddly enough, Mary's pallor changed to an angry flush. "Those two!" she exclaimed, sharply; and then, with thoroughgoing contempt: "Lamhorn! That's like them!" She turned away, went to the bare little black mantel, and stood leaning upon it. Presently she asked: "*When* did Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan say that 'no girl' could care about you?"

"To-day."

Mary drew a deep breath. "I think I'm beginning to understand—a little." She bit her lip; there was anger in good truth in her eyes and in her voice. "Answer me once more," she said. "Bibbs, do you know now why I stopped wearing my furs?"

"Yes."

"I thought so! Your sister-in-law told you, didn't she?"

"I—— I heard her say——"

"I think I know what happened, now." Mary's breath came fast and her voice shook, but she spoke rapidly. "You 'heard her say' more than that. You 'heard her say' that we were bitterly poor, and on that account I tried first to marry your brother—and then——" But now she faltered, and it was only after a convulsive effort that she was able to go on. "And then—that I tried to marry—you! You 'heard her say' that—and you believe that I don't care for you and that 'no girl' could care for you—but you think I am in such an 'extremity,' as Sibyl was—that you—— And so, not wanting me, and believing that I could not want you—except for my 'extremity'—you took your father's offer and then came to ask me—to marry you! What had *I* shown you of myself that could make you——"

Suddenly she sank down, kneeling, with her face buried in her arms upon the lap of a chair, tears overwhelming her.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried, helplessly. "Oh, *no*—you—you don't understand."

"I do, though!" she sobbed. "I do!"

He came and stood beside her. "You kill me!" he said. "I can't make it plain. From the first of your loveliness to me, I was all self. It was always you that gave and I that took. I was the dependent—I did nothing but lean on you. We always talked of me, not of you. It was all about my idiotic distresses and troubles. I thought of you as a kind of wonderful being that had no mortal or human suffering except by sympathy. You seemed to lean down—out of a rosy cloud—to be kind to me. I never dreamed *I* could do anything for *you!* I never dreamed you could need anything to be done for you by anybody. And to-day I heard that—that you——"

"You heard that I needed to marry—someone—anybody—with money," she sobbed. "And you thought we were so—so desperate—you believed that I had——"

"No!" he said, quickly. "I didn't believe you'd done one

kind thing for me—for that. No, no, no! I knew you'd *never* thought of me except generously—to give. I said I couldn't make it plain!" he cried, despairingly.

"Wait!" She lifted her head and extended her hands to him unconsciously, like a child. "Help me up, Bibbs." Then, when she was once more upon her feet, she wiped her eyes and smiled upon him ruefully and faintly, but reassuringly, as if to tell him, in that way, that she knew he had not meant to hurt her. And that smile of hers, so lamentable but so faithfully friendly, misted his own eyes, for his shamefacedness lowered them no more.

"Let me tell you what you want to tell me," she said. "You can't, because you can't put it into words—they are too humiliating for me and you're too gentle to say them. Tell me, though, isn't it true? You didn't believe that I'd tried to make you fall in love with me——"

"Never! Never for an instant!"

"You didn't believe I'd tried to make you want to marry me——"

"No, no, no!"

"I believe it, Bibbs. You thought that I was fond of you; you knew I cared for you—but you didn't think I might be—in love with you. But you thought that I might marry you without being in love with you because you did believe I had tried to marry your brother, and——"

"Mary, I only knew—for the first time—that you—that you were——"

"Were desperately poor," she said. "You can't even say that! Bibbs, it was true; I did try to make Jim want to marry me. I did!" And she sank down into the chair, weeping bitterly again. Bibbs was agonized.

"Mary," he groaned, "I didn't know you *could* cry!"

"Listen," she said. "Listen till I get through—I want you to understand. We were poor, and we weren't fitted to be. We never had been, and we didn't know what to do. We'd been almost rich; there was plenty, but my father wanted to take advantage of the growth of the town; he wanted to be

richer, but instead—well, just about the time your father finished building next door we found we hadn't anything. People say that, sometimes, meaning that they haven't anything in comparison with other people of their own kind, but we really hadn't anything—we hadn't anything at all, Bibbs. And we couldn't *do* anything. You might wonder why I didn't 'try to be a stenographer'—and I wonder myself why, when a family loses its money, people always say the daughters 'ought to go and be stenographers.' It's curious!—as if a wave of the hand made you into a stenographer. No, I'd been raised to be either married comfortably or a well-to-do old maid, if I chose not to marry. The poverty came on slowly, Bibbs, but at last it was all there—and I didn't know how to be a stenographer. I didn't know how to be anything except a well-to-do old maid or somebody's wife—and I couldn't be a well-to-do old maid. Then, Bibbs, I did what I'd been raised to know how to do. I went out to be fascinating and be married. I did it openly, at least, and with a kind of decent honesty. I told your brother I had meant to fascinate him and that I was not in love with him, but I let him think that perhaps I meant to marry him. I think I did mean to marry him. I had never cared for anybody, and I thought it might be there really *wasn't* anything more than a kind of excited fondness. I can't be sure, but I think that though I did mean to marry him I never should have done it, because that sort of a marriage is—it's sacrilege—something would have stopped me. Something did stop me; it was your sister-in-law, Sibyl. She meant no harm—but she was horrible and she put what I was doing into such horrible words—and they were the truth—oh! I *saw* myself. She was proposing a miserable compact with me—and I couldn't breathe the air of the same room with her, though I'd so cheapened myself she had a right to assume that *I would*. But I couldn't! I left her, and I wrote to your brother—just a quick scrawl. I told him just what I'd done; I asked his pardon, and I said I would not marry him. I posted the letter, but he never got it. That was the afternoon he was killed. That's all, Bibbs. Now you know

what I did—and you know—*me!*" She pressed her clenched hands tightly against her eyes, leaning far forward, her head bowed before him.

Bibbs had forgotten himself long ago; his heart broke for her. "Couldn't you—— Isn't there—— Won't you——" he stammered. "Mary, I'm going with father. Isn't there some way you could use the money without—without——"

She gave a choked little laugh.

"You gave me something to live for," he said. "You kept me alive, I think—and I've hurt you like this!"

"Not you—oh no!"

"You could forgive me, Mary?"

"Oh, a thousand times!" Her right hand went out in a faltering gesture, and just touched his own for an instant. "But there's nothing to forgive."

"And you can't—you can't——"

"Can't what, Bibbs?"

"You couldn't——"

"Marry you?" she said for him.

"Yes."

"No, no, no!" She sprang up, facing him, and, without knowing what she did, she set her hands upon his breast, pushing him back from her a little. "I can't, I can't! Don't you *see?*"

"Mary——"

"No, no! And you must go now, Bibbs; I can't bear any more—please——"

"*Mary*——"

"Never, never, never!" she cried, in a passion of tears. "You mustn't come any more. I can't see you, dear! Never, never, never!"

Somehow, in helpless, stumbling obedience to her beseeching gesture, he got himself to the door and out of the house.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIBYL and Roscoe were upon the point of leaving when Bibbs returned to the New House. He went straight to Sibyl and spoke to her quietly, but so that the others might hear.

"When you said that if I'd stop to think, I'd realize that no one would be apt to care enough about me to marry me, you were right," he said. "I thought perhaps you weren't, and so I asked Miss Vertrees to marry me. It proved what you said of me, and disproved what you said of her. She refused."

And, having thus spoken, he quitted the room as straightforwardly as he had entered it.

"He's *so* queer!" Mrs. Sheridan gasped. "Who on earth would thought of his doin' *that?*"

"I told you," said her husband, grimly.

"You didn't tell us he'd go over there and——"

"I told you she wouldn't have him. I told you she wouldn't have *Jim*, didn't I?"

Sibyl was altogether taken aback. "Do you suppose it's true? Do you suppose she *wouldn't?*"

"He didn't look exactly like a young man that had just got things fixed up fine with his girl," said Sheridan. "Not to me, he didn't!"

"But why would——"

"I told you," he interrupted, angrily, "she ain't that kind of a girl! If you got to have proof, well, I'll tell you and get it over with, though I'd pretty near just as soon not have to talk a whole lot about my dead boy's private affairs. She wrote to Jim she couldn't take him, and it was a good, straight letter, too. It came to Jim's office; he never saw it. She wrote it the afternoon he was hurt."

"I remember I saw her put a letter in the mail-box that

afternoon," said Roscoe. "Don't you remember, Sibyl? I told you about it—I was waiting for you while you were in there so long talking to her mother. It was just before we saw that something was wrong over here, and Edith came and called me."

Sibyl shook her head, but she remembered. And she was not cast down, for, although some remnants of perplexity were left in her eyes, they were dimmed by an increasing glow of triumph; and she departed—after some further fragmentary discourse—visibly elated. After all, the guilty had not been exalted; and she perceived vaguely, but none the less surely, that her injury had been copiously avenged. She bestowed a contented glance upon the old house with the cupola, as she and Roscoe crossed the street.

When they had gone, Mrs. Sheridan indulged in reverie, but after a while she said, uneasily, "Papa, you think it would be any use to tell Bibbs about that letter?"

"I don't know," he answered, walking moodily to the window. "I been thinkin' about it." He came to a decision, "I reckon I will." And he went up to Bibbs's room.

"Well, you goin' back on what you said?" he inquired, brusquely, as he opened the door. "You goin' to take it back and lay down on me again?"

"No," said Bibbs.

"Well, perhaps I didn't have any call to accuse you of that. I don't know as you ever did go back on anything you said, exactly, though the Lord knows you've laid down on me enough. You certainly have!" Sheridan was baffled. This was not what he wished to say, but his words were unmanageable; he found himself unable to control them, and his querulous abuse went on in spite of him. "I can't say I expect much of you—not from the way you always been, up to now—unless you turn over a new leaf, and I don't see any encouragement to think you're goin' to do *that!* If you go down there and show a spark o' real *git*-up, I reckon the whole office'll fall in a faint. But if you're ever goin' to show any, you better begin right at the beginning and begin to show it to-morrow."

"Yes—I'll try."

"You better, if it's in you!" Sheridan was sheerly nonplussed. He had always been able to say whatever he wished to say, but his tongue seemed bewitched. He had come to tell Bibbs about Mary's letter, and to his own angry astonishment he found it impossible to do anything except to scold like a drudge-driver. "You better come down there with your mind made up to hustle harder than the hardest-workin' man that's under you, or you'll not get on very good with me, I tell you! The way to get ahead—and you better set it down in your books—the way to get ahead is to do ten times the work of the hardest worker that works *for* you. But you don't know what work is, yet. All you've ever done was just stand around and feed a machine a child could handle, and then come home and take a bath and go callin'. I tell you you're up against a mighty different proposition now, and if you're worth your salt—and you never showed any signs of it yet—not any signs that stuck out enough to bang somebody on the head and make 'em sit up and take notice—well, I want to say, right here and now—and you better listen, because I want to say just what I *do* say. I say——"

He meandered to a full stop. His mouth hung open, and his mind was a hopeless blank.

Bibbs looked up patiently—an old, old look. "Yes, father; I'm listening."

"That's all," said Sheridan, frowning heavily. "That's all I came to say, and you better see 't you remember it!"

He shook his head warningly, and went out, closing the door behind him with a crash. However, no sound of footsteps indicated his departure. He stopped just outside the door, and stood there a minute or more. Then abruptly he turned the knob and exhibited to his son a forehead liberally covered with perspiration.

"Look here," he said, crossly. "That girl over yonder wrote Jim a letter——"

"I know," said Bibbs. "She told me."

"Well, I thought you needn't feel so much upset about it—" The door closed on his voice as he withdrew, but the conclusion of the sentence was nevertheless audible—"if you knew she wouldn't have Jim, either."

And he stamped his way downstairs to tell his wife to quit her frettin' and not bother him with any more fool's errands. She was about to inquire what Bibbs "said," but after a second thought she decided not to speak at all. She merely murmured a wordless assent, and verbal communication was given over between them for the rest of that afternoon.

Bibbs and his father were gone when Mrs. Sheridan woke, the next morning, and she had a dreary day. She missed Edith woefully, and she worried about what might be taking place in the Sheridan Building. She felt that everything depended on how Bibbs "took hold," and upon her husband's return in the evening she seized upon the first opportunity to ask him how things had gone. He was noncommittal. What could anybody tell by the first day? He'd seen plenty go at things well enough right at the start and then blow up. Pretty near anybody could show up fair the first day or so. There was a big job ahead. This material, such as it was—Bibbs, in fact—had to be broken in to handling the work Roscoe had done; and then, at least as an overseer, he must take Jim's position in the Realty Company as well. He told her to ask him again in a month.

But during the course of dinner she gathered from some disjointed remarks of his that he and Bibbs had lunched together at the small restaurant where it had been Sheridan's custom to lunch with Jim, and she took this to be an encouraging sign. Bibbs went to his room as soon as they left the table, and her husband was not communicative after reading his paper.

She became an anxious spectator of Bibbs's progress as a man of business, although it was a progress she could glimpse but dimly and only in the evening, through his remarks and his father's at dinner. Usually Bibbs was silent, except when

directly addressed, but on the first evening of the third week of his new career he offered an opinion which had apparently been the subject of previous argument.

"I'd like you to understand just what I meant about those storage-rooms, father," he said, as Jackson placed his coffee before him. "Abercrombie agreed with me, but you wouldn't listen to him."

"You can talk, if you want to, and I'll listen," Sheridan returned, "but you can't show me that Jim ever took up with a bad thing. The roof fell because it hadn't had time to settle and on account of weather conditions. I want that building put just the way Jim planned it."

"You can't have it," said Bibbs. "You can't, because Jim planned for the building to stand up, and it won't do it. The other one—the one that didn't fall—is so shot with cracks we haven't dared use it for storage. It won't stand weight. There's only one thing to do: get both buildings down as quickly as we can, and build over. Brick's the best and cheapest in the long run for that type."

Sheridan looked sarcastic. "Fine! What we goin' to do for storage-rooms while we're waitin' for those few bricks to be laid?"

"Rent," Bibbs returned, promptly. "We'll lose money if we don't rent, anyhow—they were waiting so long for you to give the warehouse matter your attention after the roof fell. You don't know what an amount of stuff they've got piled up on us over there. We'd have to rent until we could patch up those process perils—and the Krivitch Manufacturing Company's plant is empty, right across the street. I took an option on it for us this morning."

Sheridan's expression was queer. "Look here!" he said, sharply. "Did you go and do that without consulting me?"

"It didn't cost anything," said Bibbs. "It's only until to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. I undertook to convince you before then."

"Oh, you did?" Sheridan's tone was sardonic. "Well, just suppose you couldn't convince me."

"I can, though—and I intend to," said Bibbs, quietly. "I don't think you understand the condition of those buildings you want patched up."

"Now, see here," said Sheridan, with slow emphasis; "suppose I had my mind set about this. *Jim* thought they'd stand, and suppose it was—well, kind of a matter of sentiment with me to prove he was right."

Bibbs looked at him compassionately. "I'm sorry if you have a sentiment about it, father," he said. "But whether you have or not can't make a difference. You'll get other people hurt if you trust that process, and that won't do. And if you want a monument to Jim, at least you want one that will stand. Besides, I don't think you can reasonably defend sentiment in this particular kind of affair."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No, but I'm sorry you didn't tell me you felt it."

Sheridan was puzzled by his son's tone. "Why are you 'sorry'?" he asked, curiously.

"Because I had the building inspector up there, this noon," said Bibbs, "and I had him condemn both those buildings."

"What?"

"He'd been afraid to do it before, until he heard from us—afraid you'd see he lost his job. But he can't un-condemn them—they've got to come down now."

Sheridan gave him a long and piercing stare from beneath lowered brows. Finally he said, "How long did they give you on that option to convince me?"

"Until two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"All right," said Sheridan, not relaxing. "I'm convinced."

Bibbs jumped up. "I thought you would be. I'll telephone the Krivitch agent. He gave me the option until to-morrow, but I told him I'd settle it this evening."

Sheridan gazed after him as he left the room, and then, though his expression did not alter in the slightest, a sound came from him that startled his wife. It had been a long time since she had heard anything resembling a chuckle from him,

and this sound—although it was grim and dry—bore that resemblance.

She brightened eagerly. "Looks like he was startin' right well, don't it, papa?"

"Startin'? Lord! He got me on the hip! Why, *he* knew what I wanted—that's why he had the inspector up there, so 't he'd have me beat before we even started to talk about it. And did you hear him? 'Can't reasonably defend *sentiment!*' And the way he says 'Us': 'Took an option for Us'! 'Stuff piled up on Us'!"

There was always an alloy for Mrs. Sheridan. "I don't just like the way he looks, though, papa."

"Oh, there's got to be something! Only one chick left at home, so you start to frettin' about *it!*"

"No. He's changed. There's kind of a settish look to his face, and——"

"I'guess that's the common sense comin' out on him, then," said Sheridan. "You'll see symptoms like that in a good many business men, I expect."

"Well, and he don't have as good colour as he was gettin' before. And he'd begun to fill out some, but——"

Sheridan gave forth another dry chuckle, and, going round the table to her, patted her upon the shoulder with his left hand, his right being still heavily bandaged, though he no longer wore a sling. "That's the way it is with you, mamma—got to take your frettin' out one way if you don't another!"

"No. He don't look well. It ain't exactly the way he looked when he begun to get sick that time, but he kind o' seems to be losin', some way."

"Yes, he may 'a' lost something," said Sheridan. "I expect he's lost a whole lot o' foolishness besides his Godforsaken notions about writin' poetry and——"

"No," his wife persisted. "I mean he looks right peakid. And yesterday, when he was settin' with us, he kept lookin' out the window. He wasn't readin'."

"Well, why shouldn't he look out the window?"

"He was lookin' over there. He never read a word all afternoon, I don't believe."

"Look here!" said Sheridan. "Bibbs might 'a' kept goin' on over there the rest of his life, moonin' on and on, but what he heard Sibyl say did one big thing, anyway. It woke him up out of his trance. Well, he had to go and bust clean out with a bang; and that stopped his goin' over there, and it stopped his poetry, but I reckon he's begun to get pretty fair pay for what he lost. I guess a good many young men have had to get over worries like his; they got to lose *something* if they're goin' to keep ahead o' the procession nowadays—and it kind o' looks to me, mamma, like Bibbs might keep quite a considerable long way ahead. Why, a year from now I'll bet you he won't know there ever *was* such a thing as poetry! And ain't he funny? He wanted to stick to the shop so's he could 'think'! What he meant was, think about something useless. Well, I guess he's keepin' his mind pretty occupied the other way these days. Yes, sir, it took a pretty fair-sized shock to get him out of his trance, but it certainly did the business." He patted his wife's shoulder again, and then, without any prefatory symptoms, broke into a boisterous laugh.

"Honest, mamma, he works like a gorilla!"

CHAPTER XXX

AND so Bibbs sat in the porch of the temple with the money-changers. But no One came to scourge him forth, for this was the temple of Bigness, and the changing of money was holy worship and true religion. The priests wore that "settish" look Bibbs's mother had seen beginning to develop about his mouth and eyes—a wary look which she could not define, but it comes with service at the temple; and it was the more marked upon Bibbs for his sharp awakening to the necessities of that service.

He did as little "useless" thinking as possible, giving himself no time for it. He worked continuously, keeping his thoughts still on his work when he came home at night; and he talked of nothing whatever except his work. But he did not sing at it. He was often in the strrets, and people were not allowed to sing in the streets. They might make any manner of hideous uproar—they could shake buildings; they could out-thunder the thunder, deafen the deaf, and kill the sick with noise; or they could walk the streets or drive through them bawling, squawking, or screeching, as they chose, if the noise was traceably connected with business; though street musicians were not tolerated, being considered a nuisance and an interference. A man or woman who went singing for pleasure through the streets—like a crazy Neapolitan—would have been stopped, and belike locked up; for Freedom does not mean that a citizen is allowed to do every outrageous thing that comes into his head. The streets were dangerous enough, in all conscience, without any singing! and the Motor Federation issued public warnings declaring that the pedestrian's life was in his own hands, and giving directions how to proceed with the least peril. However, Bibbs Sheridan had no desire to sing in the streets, or anywhere. He had gone to

his work with an energy that, for the start, at least, was bitter, and there was no song left in him.

He began to know his active fellow-citizens. Here and there among them he found a leisurely, kind soul, a relic of the old period of neighbourliness, "pioneer stock," usually; and there were men—particularly among the merchants and manufacturers—"so honest they leaned backward"; reputations sometimes attested by stories of heroic sacrifices to honour; nor were there lacking some instances of generosity even nobler. Here and there, too, were book-men, in their little leisure; and, among the Germans, music-men. And these, with the others, worshipped Bigness and the growth, each man serving for his own sake and for what he could get out of it, but all united in their faith in the beneficence and glory of their god.

To almost all alike that service stood as the most important thing in life, except on occasion of some such vital, brief interregnum as the dangerous illness of a wife or child. In the way of "relaxation" some of the servers took golf; some took fishing; some took "shows"—a mixture of infantile and negroid humour, stockings, and tin music; some took an occasional debauch; some took "trips"; some took cards; and some took nothing. The high priests were vigilant to watch that no "relaxation" should affect the service. When a man attended to anything outside his business, eyes were upon him; his credit was in danger—that is, his life was in danger. And the old priests were as ardent as the young ones; the million was as eager to be bigger as the thousand; seventy was as busy as seventeen. They strove mightily against one another, and the old priests were the most wary, the most plausible, and the most dangerous. Bibbs learned he must walk charily among these—he must wear a thousand eyes and beware of spiders indeed!

And outside the temple itself were the pretenders, the swarming thieves and sharpers and fleecers, the sly rascals and the open rascals; but these were feeble folk, not dangerous once he knew them, and he had a good guide to point them

out to him. They were useful sometimes, he learned, and many of them served as go-betweens in matters where business must touch politics. He learned also how breweries and "traction" companies and banks and other institutions fought one another for the political control of the city. The newspapers, he discovered, had lost their ancient political influence, especially with the knowing, who looked upon them with a skeptical humour, believing the journals either to be retained partisans, like lawyers, or else striving to forward the personal ambitions of their owners. The control of the city lay not with them, but was usually obtained by giving the hordes of negroes gin-money, and by other largesses. The revenues of the people were then distributed as fairly as possible among a great number of men who had assisted the winning side. Names and titles of offices went with many of the prizes, and most of these title-holders were expected to present a busy appearance at times; and, indeed, some among them did work honestly and faithfully.

Bibbs had been very ignorant. All these simple things, so well known and customary, astonished him at first, and once —in a brief moment of forgetting that he was done with writing—he thought that if he had known them and written of them, how like a satire the plainest relation of them must have seemed! Strangest of all to him was the vehement and sincere patriotism. On every side he heard it—it was a permeation; the newest school-child caught it, though just from Hungary and learning to stammer a few words of the local language. Everywhere the people shouted of the power, the size, the riches, and the growth of their city. Not only that, they said that the people of their city were the greatest, the "finest," the strongest, the Biggest people on earth. They cited no authorities, and felt the need of none, being themselves the people thus celebrated. And if the thing was questioned, or if it was hinted that there might be one small virtue in which they were not perfect and supreme, they wasted no time examining themselves to see if what the critic said was true, but fell upon him and hooted him and cursed

him, for they were sensitive. So Bibbs, learning their ways and walking with them, harkened to the voice of the people and served Bigness with them. For the voice of the people is the voice of their god.

Sheridan had made the room next to his own into an office for Bibbs, and the door between the two rooms usually stood open—the father had established that intimacy. One morning in February, when Bibbs was alone, Sheridan came in, some sheets of typewritten memoranda in his hand.

"Bibbs," he said, "I don't like to butt in very often this way, and when I do I usually wish I hadn't—but for Heaven's sake what have you been buying that ole busted inter-traction stock for?"

Bibbs leaned back from his desk. "For eleven hundred and fifty-five dollars. That's all it cost."

"Well, it ain't worth eleven hundred and fifty-five cents. You ought to know that. I don't get your idea. That stuff's deader 'n Adam's cat!"

"It might be worth something—some day."

"How?"

"It mightn't be so dead—not if We went into it," said Bibbs, coolly.

"Oh!" Sheridan considered this musingly; then he said, "Who'd you buy it from?"

"A broker—Fansmith."

"Well, he must 'a' got it from one o' the crowd o' poor ninnies that was soaked with it. Don't you know who owned it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Ain't sayin', though? That it? What's the matter?"

"It belonged to Mr. Vertrees," said Bibbs, shortly, applying himself to his desk.

"So!" Sheridan gazed down at his son's thin face. "Excuse me," he said. "Your business." And he went back to his own room. But presently he looked in again.

"I reckon you won't mind lunchin' alone to-day"—he was

shuffling himself into his overcoat—"because I just thought I'd go up to the house and get *this* over with mamma." He glanced apologetically toward his right hand as it emerged from the sleeve of the overcoat. The bandages had been removed, finally, that morning, revealing but three fingers—the forefinger and the finger next to it had been amputated. "She's bound to make an awful fuss, and it better spoil her lunch than her dinner. I'll be back about two."

But he calculated the time of his arrival at the New House so accurately that Mrs. Sheridan's lunch was not disturbed, and she was rising from the lonely table when he came into the dining-room. He had left his overcoat in the hall, but he kept his hands in his trousers pockets.

"What's the matter, papa?" she asked, quickly. "Has anything gone wrong? You ain't sick?"

"Me!" He laughed loudly. "Me *sick?*"

"You had lunch?"

"Didn't want any to-day. You can give me a cup o' coffee, though."

She rang, and told George to have coffee made, and when he had withdrawn she said querulously, "I just know there's something wrong."

"Nothin' in the world," he responded, heartily, taking a seat at the head of the table. "I thought I'd talk over a notion o' mine with you, that's all. It's more women-folks' business than what it is man's, anyhow."

"What about?"

"Why, ole Doc Gurney was up at the office this morning awhile——"

"To look at your hand? How's he say it's doin'?"

"Fine! Well, he went in and sat around with Bibbs awhile——"

Mrs. Sheridan nodded pessimistically. "I guess it's time you had him, too. I *knew* Bibbs——"

"Now, mamma, hold your horses! I wanted him to look Bibbs over *before* anything's the matter. You don't suppose I'm goin' to take any chances with *Bibbs*, do you? Well, after-

wards, I shut the door, and I an' ole Gurney had a talk. He's a mighty disagreeable man; he rubbed it in on me what he said about Bibbs havin' brains if he ever woke up. Then I thought he must want to get something out o' me, he got so flattering—for a minute! 'Bibbs couldn't help havin' business brains,' he says, 'bein' *your* son. Don't be surprised,' he says —'don't be surprised at his makin' a success,' he says. 'He couldn't get over his heredity; he couldn't *help* bein' a business success—once you got him into it. It's in his blood. Yes, sir,' he says, 'it doesn't need *much* brains,' he says, 'an' only third-rate brains, at that,' he says, 'but it does need a special *kind* o' brains,' he says, 'to be a millionaire. I mean,' he says, 'when a man's given a start. If nobody gives him a start, why, course he's got to have luck *and* the right kind o' brains. The only miracle about Bibbs,' he says, 'is where he got the *other* kind o' brains—the brains you made him quit usin' and throw away.'"

"But what'd he say about his health?" Mrs. Sheridan demanded, impatiently, as George placed a cup of coffee before her husband. Sheridan helped himself to cream and sugar, and began to sip the coffee.

"I'm comin' to that," he returned, placidly. "See how easy I manage this cup with my left hand, mamma?"

"You been doin' that all winter. What did——"

"It's wonderful," he interrupted, admiringly, "what a fellow can do with his left hand. I can sign my name with mine now, well's I ever could with my right. It came a little hard at first, but now, honest, I believe I *rather* sign with my left. That's all I ever have to write, anyway—just the signature. Rest's all dictatin'." He blew across the top of the cup unctuously. "Good coffee, mamma! Well, about Bibbs. Ole Gurney says he believes if Bibbs could somehow get back to the state o' mind he was in about the machine-shop—that is, if he could some way get to feelin' about business the way he felt about the shop—not the poetry and writin' part, but——" He paused, supplementing his remarks with a motion of his head toward the old house next door. "He says Bibbs is older

and harder 'n what he was when he broke down that time, and besides, he ain't the kind o' dreamy way he was then—and I should say he *ain't!* I'd like 'em to show *me* anybody his age that's any wider awake! But he says Bibbs's health'll never need bother us again if——"

Mrs. Sheridan shook her head. "I don't see any help *that* way. You know yourself she wouldn't have Jim."

"Who's talkin' about her havin' anybody? But, my Lord! she might let him *look* at her! She needn't 'a' got so mad, just because he asked her, that she won't let him come in the house any more. He's a mighty funny boy, and some ways I reckon he's pretty near as hard to understand as the Bible, but Gurney kind o' got me in the way o' thinkin' that if she'd let him come back and set around with her an evening or two sometimes—not reg'lar, I don't mean—why—— Well, I just thought I'd see what *you'd* think of it. There ain't any way to talk about it to Bibbs himself—I don't suppose he'd let you, anyhow—but I thought maybe you could kind o' slip over there some day, and sort o' fix up to have a little talk with her, and kind o' hint around till you see how the land lays, and ask her——"

"*Me!*" Mrs. Sheridan looked both helpless and frightened. "No." She shook her head decidedly. "It wouldn't do any good."

"You won't try it?"

"I won't risk her turnin' me out o' the house. Some way, that's what I believe she did to Sibyl, from what Roscoe said once. No, I *can't*—and, what's more, it'd only make things worse. If people find out you're runnin' after 'em they think you're cheap, and then they won't do as much for you as if you let 'em alone. I don't believe it's any use, and *I* couldn't do it if it was."

He sighed with resignation. "All right, mamma. That's all." Then, in a livelier tone, he said: "Ole Gurney took the bandages off my hand this morning. All healed up. Says I don't need 'em any more."

"Why, that's splendid, papa!" she cried, beaming. "I was afraid—— Let's see."

She came toward him, but he rose, still keeping his hand in his pocket. "Wait a minute," he said, smiling. "Now it may give you just a little teeny bit of a shock, but the fact is —well, you remember that Sunday when Sibyl came over here and made all that fuss about nothin'—it was the day after I got tired o' that statue when Edith's telegram came——"

"Let me see your hand!" she cried.

"Now wait!" he said, laughing and pushing her away with his left hand. "The truth is, mamma, that I kind o' slipped out on you that morning, when you wasn't lookin', and went down to ole Gurney's office—he'd told me to, you see—and, well, it doesn't *amount* to anything." And he held out, for her inspection, the mutilated hand. "You see, these days when it's all dictatin', anyhow, nobody'd mind just a couple o'——"

He had to jump for her—she went over backward. For the second time in her life Mrs. Sheridan fainted.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT WAS a full hour later when he left her lying upon a couch in her own room, still lamenting intermittently, though he assured her with heat that the "fuss" she was making irked him far more than his physical loss. He permitted her to think that he meant to return directly to his office, but when he came out to the open air he told the chauffeur in attendance to await him in front of Mr. Vertrees's house, whither he himself proceeded on foot.

Mr. Vertrees had taken the sale of half of his worthless stock as manna in the wilderness: it came from heaven—by what agency he did not particularly question. The broker informed him that "parties were interested in getting hold of the stock," and that later there might be a possible increase in the value of the large amount retained by his client. It might go "quite a ways up" within a year or so, he said, and he advised "sitting tight" with it. Mr. Vertrees went home and prayed.

He rose from his knees feeling that he was surely coming into his own again. It was more than a mere gasp of temporary relief with him, and his wife shared his optimism; but Mary would not let him buy back her piano, and as for furs—spring was on the way, she said. But they paid the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, and hired a cook once more. It was this servitress who opened the door for Sheridan and presently assured him that Miss Vertrees would "be down."

He was not the man to conceal admiration when he felt it, and he flushed and beamed as Mary made her appearance, almost upon the heels of the cook. She had a look of apprehension for the first fraction of a second, but it vanished at the

sight of him, and its place was taken in her eyes by a soft brilliance, while colour rushed in her cheeks.

"Don't be surprised," he said. "Truth is, in a way, it's sort of on business I looked in here. It'll only take a minute, I expect."

"I'm sorry," said Mary. "I hoped you'd come because we're neighbours."

He chuckled. "Neighbours! Sometimes people don't see so much o' their neighbours as they used to. That is, I hear so—lately."

"You'll stay long enough to sit down, won't you?"

"I guess I could manage that much." And they sat down, facing each other and not far apart.

"Of course, it couldn't be called business, exactly," he said, more gravely. "Not at all, I expect. But there's something o' yours it seemed to me I ought to give you, and I just thought it was better to bring it myself and explain how I happened to have it. It's this—this letter you wrote my boy." He extended the letter to her solemnly, in his left hand, and she took it gently from him. "It was in his mail, after he was hurt. You knew he never got it, I expect."

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

He sighed. "I'm glad he didn't. Not," he added, quickly—"not but what you did just right to send it. You did. You couldn't acted any other way when it came right down *to* it. There ain't any blame comin' to you—you were above-board all through."

Mary said, "Thank you," almost in a whisper, and with her head bowed low.

"You'll have to excuse me for readin' it. I had to take charge of all his mail and everything; I didn't know the handwritin', and I read it all—once I got started."

"I'm glad you did."

"Well"—he leaned forward as if to rise—"I guess that's about all. I just thought you ought to have it."

"Thank you for bringing it."

He looked at her hopefully, as if he thought and wished

that she might have something more to say. But she seemed not to be aware of this glance, and sat with her eyes fixed sorrowfully upon the floor.

"Well, I expect I better be gettin' back to the office," he said, rising desperately. "I told—I told my partner I'd be back at two o'clock, and I guess he'll think I'm a poor business man if he catches me behind time. I got to walk the chalk a mighty straight line these days—with *that* fellow keepin' tabs on me!"

Mary rose with him. "I've always heard *you* were the hard driver."

He guffawed derisively. "Me? I'm nothin' to that partner o' mine. You couldn't guess to save your life how he keeps after me to hold up my end o' the job. I shouldn't be surprised he'd give me the grand bounce some day, and run the whole circus by himself. You know how he is—once he goes *at* a thing!"

"No," she smiled. "I didn't know you had a partner. I'd always heard——"

He laughed, looking away from her. "It's just my way o' speakin' o' that boy o' mine, Bibbs."

He stood then, expectant, staring out into the hall with an air of careless geniality. He felt that she certainly must at least say, "How *is* Bibbs?" but she said nothing at all, though he waited until the silence became embarrassing.

"Well, I guess I better be gettin' down there," he said, at last. "He might worry."

"Good-bye—and thank you," said Mary.

"For what?"

"For the letter."

"Oh," he said, blankly. "You're welcome. Good-bye."

Mary put out her hand. "Good-bye."

"You'll have to excuse my left hand," he said. "I had a little accident to the other one."

She gave a pitying cry as she saw. "Oh, poor Mr. Sheridan!"

"Nothin' at all! Dictate everything nowadays, anyhow."

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He laughed jovially. "Did anybody tell you how it happened?"

"I heard you hurt your hand, but no—not just how."

"It was this way," he began, and both, as if unconsciously, sat down again. "You may not know it, but I used to worry a good deal about the youngest o' my boys—the one that used to come to see you sometimes, after Jim—that is, I mean Bibbs. He's the one I spoke of as my partner; and the truth is that's what it's just about goin' to amount to, one o' these days—if his health holds out. Well, you remember, I expect, I had him on a machine over at a plant o' mine; and sometimes I'd kind o' sneak in there and see how he was gettin' along. Take a doctor with me sometimes, because Bibbs never *was* so robust, you might say. Ole Doc Gurney—I guess maybe you know him? Tall, thin man; acts sleepy——"

"Yes."

"Well, one day I an' ole Doc Gurney, we were in there, and I undertook to show Bibbs how to run his machine. He told me to look out, but I wouldn't listen, and I didn't look out—and that's how I got my hand hurt, tryin' to show Bibbs how to do something he knew how to do and I didn't. Made me so mad I just wouldn't even admit to myself it *was* hurt—and so, by and by, ole Doc Gurney had to take kind o' radical measures with me. He's a right good doctor, too. Don't you think so, Miss Vertrees?"

"Yes."

"Yes, he is so!" Sheridan now had the air of a rambling talker and gossip with all day on his hands. "Take him on Bibbs's case. I was talkin' about Bibbs's case with him this morning. Well, you'd laugh to hear the way ole Gurney talks about *that!* 'Course he *is* just as much a friend as he is doctor—and he takes as much interest in Bibbs as if he was in the family. He says Bibbs isn't anyways bad off *yet;* and he thinks he could stand the pace and get fat on it if—well, this is what'd made *you* laugh if you'd been there, Miss Vertrees—honest it would!" He paused to chuckle, and stole a glance at her. She was gazing straight before her at the wall; her

lips were parted, and—visibly—she was breathing heavily and quickly. He feared that she was growing furiously angry; but he had led to what he wanted to say, and he went on, determined now to say it all. He leaned forward and altered his voice to one of confidential friendliness, though in it he still maintained a tone which indicated that ole Doc Gurney's opinion was only a joke he shared with her. "Yes, sir, you certainly would 'a' laughed! Why, that ole man thinks *you* got something to do with it. You'll have to blame it on him, young lady, if it makes you feel like startin' out to whip somebody! He's actually got *this* theory: he says Bibbs got to gettin' better while he worked over there at the shop because you kept him cheered up and feelin' good. And he says if you could manage to just stand him hangin' around a little—maybe not much, but just *some*times—again, he believed it 'd do Bibbs a mighty lot o' good. 'Course, that's only what the doctor said. Me, I don't know anything about that; but I can say this much—I never saw any such a *mental* improvement in anybody in my life as I have lately in Bibbs. I expect you'd find him a good deal more entertaining than what he used to be—and I know it's a kind of embarrassing thing to suggest after the way he piled in over here that day to ask you to stand up before the preacher with him, but according to ole Doc *Gurney*, he's got you on his brain so bad——"

Mary jumped. "Mr. Sheridan!" she exclaimed.

He sighed profoundly. "There! I noticed you were gettin' mad. I didn't——"

"No, no, no!" she cried. "But I don't understand—and I think you don't. What is it you want me to do?"

He sighed again, but this time with relief. "Well, well!" he said. "You're right. It'll be easier to talk plain. I ought to known I could with you, all the time. I just hoped you'd let that boy come and see you sometimes, once more. Could you?"

"You don't understand." She clasped her hands together in a sorrowful gesture. "Yes, we must talk plain. Bibbs heard that I'd tried to make your oldest son care for me because I

was poor, and so Bibbs came and asked me to marry him—because he was sorry for me. And I *can't* see him any more," she cried in distress. "I *can't!*"

Sheridan cleared his throat uncomfortably. "You mean because he thought that about you?"

"No, no! What he thought was *true!*"

"Well—you mean he was so much in—you mean he thought so much of you——" The words were inconceivably awkward upon Sheridan's tongue; he seemed to be in doubt even about pronouncing them, but after a ghastly pause he bravely repeated them. "You mean he thought so much of you that you just couldn't stand him around?"

"*No!* He was sorry for me. He cared for me; he was fond of me; and he'd respected me—too much! In the finest way he loved me, if you like, and he'd have done anything on earth for me, as I would for him, and as he knew I would. It was beautiful, Mr. Sheridan," she said. "But the cheap, bad things one has done seem always to come back—they wait, and pull you down when you're happiest. Bibbs found me out, you see; and he wasn't 'in love' with me at all."

"He wasn't? Well, it seems to me he gave up everything he wanted to do—it was fool stuff, but he certainly wanted it mighty bad—he just threw it away and walked right up and took the job he swore he never would—just for you. And it looks to me as if a man that'd do that must think quite a heap o' the girl he does it for! You say it was only because he was sorry, but let me tell you there's only *one* girl he could feel *that* sorry for! Yes, sir!"

"No, no," she said. "Bibbs isn't like other men—he would do anything for anybody."

Sheridan grinned. "Perhaps not so much as you think, nowadays," he said. "For instance, I got kind of a suspicion he doesn't believe in 'sentiment in business.' But that's neither here nor there. What he wanted was, just plain and simple, for you to marry him. Well, I was afraid his thinkin' so much *of* you had kind o' sickened you of him—the way it does sometimes. But from the way you talk, I understand

that ain't the trouble." He coughed, and his voice trembled a little. "Now here, Miss Vertrees, I don't have to tell you—because you see things easy—I know I got no business comin' to you like this, but I had to make Bibbs go my way instead of his own—I had to do it for the sake o' my business and on his own account, too—and I expect you got some idea how it hurt him to give up. Well, he's made good. He didn't come in half-hearted or mean; he came in—all the way. But there isn't anything in it to him; you can see he's just shut his teeth on it and goin' ahead with dust in his mouth. You see, one way of lookin' at it, he's got nothin' to work *for*. And it seems to me like it cost him your friendship, and I believe—honest—that's what hurt him the worst. Now you said we'd talk plain. Why can't you let him come back?"

She covered her face desperately with her hands. "I can't!"

He rose, defeated, and looking it.

"Well, I mustn't press you," he said, gently.

At that she cried out, and dropped her hands and let him see her face. "Ah! He was only sorry for me!"

He gazed at her intently. Mary was proud, but she had a fatal honesty, and it confessed the truth of her now; she was helpless. It was so clear that even Sheridan, marvelling and amazed, was able to see it. Then a change came over him; gloom fell from him, and he grew radiant.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried. "You mustn't——"

"I won't tell him," said Sheridan, from the doorway. "I won't tell anybody anything!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THERE was a heavy town-fog that afternoon, a smoke-mist, densest in the sanctuary of the temple. The people went about in it, busy and dirty, thickening their outside and inside linings of coal-tar, asphalt, sulphurous acid, oil of vitriol, and the other familiar things the men liked to breathe and to have upon their skins and garments and upon their wives and babies and sweethearts. The growth of the city was visible in the smoke and the noise and the rush. There was more smoke than there had been this day of February a year earlier; there was more noise; and the crowds were thicker—yet quicker in spite of that. 'The traffic policeman had a hard time, for the people were independent—they retained some habits of the old market-town period, and would cross the street anywhere and anyhow, which not only got them killed more frequently than if they clung to the legal crossings, but kept the motormen, the chauffeurs, and the truck-drivers in a stew of profane nervousness. So the traffic policemen led harried lives; they themselves were killed, of course, with a certain periodicity, but their main trouble was that they could not make the citizens realize that it was actually and mortally perilous to go about their city. It was strange, for there were probably no citizens of any length of residence who had not personally known either someone who had been killed or injured in an accident, or someone who had accidentally killed or injured others. And yet, perhaps it was not strange, seeing the sharp preoccupation of the faces—the people had something on their minds; they could not stop to bother about dirt and danger.

Mary Vertrees was not often downtown; she had never seen an accident until this afternoon. She had come upon errands for her mother connected with a timorous refurbish-

ment; and as she did these, in and out of the department stores, she had an insistent consciousness of the Sheridan Building. From the street, anywhere, it was almost always in sight, like some monstrous geometrical shadow, murk-coloured and rising limitlessly into the swimming heights of the smoke-mist. It was gaunt and grimy and repellent; it had nothing but strength and size—but in that consciousness of Mary's the great structure may have partaken of beauty. Sheridan had made some of the things he said emphatic enough to remain with her. She went over and over them—and they began to seem true: "Only *one* girl he could feel *that* sorry for!" "Gurney says he's got you on his brain so bad——" The man's clumsy talk began to sing in her heart. The song was begun there when she saw the accident.

She was directly opposite the Sheridan Building then, waiting for the traffic to thin before she crossed, though other people were risking the passage, darting and halting and dodging parlously. Two men came from the crowd behind her, talking earnestly, and started across. Both wore black; one was tall and broad and thick, and the other was taller, but noticeably slender. And Mary caught her breath, for they were Bibbs and his father. They did not see her, and she caught a phrase in Bibbs's mellow voice which had taken a crisper ring: "Sixty-eight thousand dollars? Not sixty-eight thousand buttons!" It started her queerly, and as there was a glimpse of his profile she saw for the first time a resemblance to his father.

She watched them. In the middle of the street Bibbs had to step ahead of his father, and the two were separated. But the reckless passing of a truck, beyond the second line of rails, frightened a group of country women who were in course of passage; they were just in front of Bibbs, and shoved backward upon him violently. To extricate himself from them he stepped back, directly in front of a moving trolley-car—no place for absent-mindedness, but Bibbs was still absorbed in thoughts concerned with what he had been saying to his father. There were shrieks and yells; Bibbs looked the wrong

way—and then Mary saw the heavy figure of Sheridan plunge straight forward in front of the car. With absolute disregard of his own life, he hurled himself at Bibbs like a football-player shunting off an opponent, and to Mary it seemed that they both went down together. But that was all she could see—automobiles, trucks, and wagons closed in between. She made out that the trolley-car stopped jerkily, and she saw a policeman breaking his way through the instantly condensing crowd, while the traffic came to a standstill, and people stood up in automobiles or climbed upon the hubs and tires of wheels, not to miss a chance of seeing anything horrible.

Mary tried to get through; it was impossible. Other policemen came to help the first, and in a minute or two the traffic was in motion again. The crowd became pliant, dispersing—there was no figure upon the ground, and no ambulance came. But one of the policemen was detained by the clinging and beseeching of a gloved hand.

"What *is* the matter, lady?"

"Where are they?" Mary cried.

"Who? Ole man Sheridan? I reckon *he* wasn't much hurt!"

"His *son*——"

"Was that who the other one was? I seen him knock him—oh, he's not bad off, I guess, lady. The ole man got him out of the way all right. The fender shoved the ole man around some, but I reckon he only got shook up. They both went on in the Sheridan Building without any help. Excuse me, lady."

Sheridan and Bibbs, in fact, were at that moment in the elevator, ascending. "Whisk-broom up in the office," Sheridan was saying. "You got to look out on these corners nowadays, I tell you. I don't know *I* got any call to blow, though—because I tried to cross after you did. That's how I happened to run into you. Well, you want remember to look out after this. We were talkin' about Murtrie's askin' sixty-eight thousand flat for that ninety-nine-year lease. It's his lookout if he'd rather take it that way, and I don't know but——"

"No," said Bibbs, emphatically, as the elevator stopped;

"he won't get it. Not from Us, he won't, and I'll show you why. I can convince you in five minutes." He followed his father into the office anteroom—and convinced him. Then, having been diligently brushed by a youth of colour, Bibbs went into his own room and closed the door.

He was more shaken than he had allowed his father to perceive, and his side was sore where Sheridan had struck him. He desired to be alone; he wanted to rub himself and, for once, to do some useless thinking again. He knew that his father had not "happened" to run into him; he knew that Sheridan had instantly—and instinctively—proved that he held his own life of no account whatever compared to that of his son and heir. Bibbs had been unable to speak of that, or to seem to know it; for Sheridan, just as instinctively, had swept the matter aside—as of no importance, since all was well—reverting immediately to business.

Bibbs began to think intently of his father. He perceived, as he had never perceived before, the shadowing of something enormous and indomitable—and lawless; not to be daunted by the will of nature's very self; laughing at the lightning and at wounds and mutilation; conquering, irresistible—and blindly noble. For the first time in his life Bibbs began to understand the meaning of being truly this man's son.

He would be the more truly his son henceforth, though, as Sheridan said, Bibbs had not come downtown with him meanly or half-heartedly. He had given his word because he had wanted the money, simply, for Mary Vertrees in her need. And he shivered with horror of himself, thinking how he had gone to her to offer it, asking her to marry him—with his head on his breast in shameful fear that she would accept him! He had not known her; the knowing had lost her to him, and this had been his real awakening; for he knew now how deep had been that slumber wherein he dreamily celebrated the superiority of "friendship"! The sleep-walker had wakened to bitter knowledge of love and life, finding himself a failure in both. He had made a burnt offering of his dreams,

and the sacrifice had been an unforgiveable hurt to Mary. All that was left for him was the work he had not chosen, but at least he would not fail in that, though it was indeed no more than "dust in his mouth." If there had been anything "to work for——"

He went to the window, raised it, and let in the uproar of the streets below. He looked down at the blurred, hurrying swarms—and he looked across, over the roofs with their panting jets of vapour, into the vast, foggy heart of the smoke. Dizzy traceries of steel were rising dimly against it, chattering with steel on steel, and screeching in steam, while tiny figures of men walked on threads in the dull sky. Buildings would overtop the Sheridan. Bigness was being served.

But what for? The old question came to Bibbs with a new despair. Here, where his eye fell, had once been green fields and running brooks, and how had the kind earth been despoiled and disfigured! The pioneers had begun the work, but in their old age their orators had said for them that they had toiled and risked and sacrificed that their posterity might live in peace and wisdom, enjoying the fruits of the earth. Well, their posterity was here—and there was only turmoil. Where was the promised land? It had been promised by the soldiers of all the wars; it had been promised to this generation by the pioneers; but here was the very posterity to whom it had been promised, toiling and risking and sacrificing in turn—for what?

The harsh roar of the city came in through the open window, continuously beating upon Bibbs's ear until he began to distinguish a pulsation in it—a broken and irregular cadence. It seemed to him that it was like a titanic voice, discordant, hoarse, rustily metallic—the voice of the god, Bigness. And the voice summoned Bibbs as it summoned all its servants.

"Come and work!" it seemed to call. "Come and work for Me, all men! By your youth and your hope I summon you! By your age and your despair I summon you to work for Me

yet a little, with what strength you have. By your love of home I summon you! By your love of woman I summon you! By your hope of children I summon you!

"You shall be blind slaves of Mine, blind to everything but Me, your Master and Driver! For your reward you shall gaze only upon my ugliness. You shall give your toil and your lives, you shall go mad for love and worship of my ugliness! You shall perish still worshiping Me, and your children shall perish knowing no other god!"

And then, as Bibbs closed the window down tight, he heard his father's voice booming in the next room; he could not distinguish the words, but the tone was exultant—and there came the *thump ! thump !* of the maimed hand. Bibbs guessed that Sheridan was bragging of the city and of Bigness to some visitor from out-of-town.

And he thought how truly Sheridan was the high priest of Bigness. But with the old, old thought again, "What for?" Bibbs caught a glimmer of far, faint light. He saw that Sheridan had all his life struggled and conquered, and must all his life go on struggling and inevitably conquering, as part of a vast impulse not his own. Sheridan served blindly—but was the impulse blind? Bibbs asked himself if it was not he who had been in the greater hurry, after all. The kiln must be fired before the vase is glazed, and the Acropolis was not crowned with marble in a day.

Then the voice came to him again, but there was a strain in it as of some huge music struggling to be born of the turmoil. "Ugly I am," it seemed to say to him, "but never forget I *am* a god!" And the voice grew in sonorousness and in dignity. "The highest should serve, but so long as you worship me for my own sake I will not serve you. It is man who makes me ugly, by his worship of me. If man would let me serve him, I should be beautiful!"

Looking once more from the window, Bibbs sculptured for himself—in the vague contortions of the smoke and fog above the roofs—a gigantic figure with feet pedestalled upon the great buildings and shoulders disappearing in the clouds, a

colossus of steel and wholly blackened with soot. But Bibbs carried his fancy further—for there was still a little poet lingering in the back of his head—and he thought that up over the clouds, unseen from below, the giant laboured with his hands in the clean sunshine; and Bibbs had a glimpse of what he made there—perhaps for a fellowship of the children of the children that were children now—a noble and joyous city, unbelievably white——

It was the telephone that called him from his vision. It rang fiercely.

He lifted the thing from his desk and answered—and as the small voice inside it spoke he dropped the receiver with a crash. He trembled violently as he picked it up, but he told himself he was wrong—he had been mistaken—yet it was a startlingly beautiful voice; startlingly kind, too, and ineffably like the one he hungered most to hear.

"Who?" he said, his own voice shaking—like his hand.

"Mary."

He responded with two hushed and incredulous words: "*Is it?*"

There was a little thrill of pathetic half-laughter in the instrument. "Bibbs—I wanted to—just to see if you——"

"Yes—Mary?"

"I was looking when you were so nearly run over. I saw it, Bibbs. They said you hadn't been hurt, they thought, but I wanted to know for myself."

"No, no, I wasn't hurt at all—Mary. It was father who came nearer it. He saved me."

"Yes, I saw; but you had fallen. I couldn't get through the crowd until you had gone. And I wanted to *know*."

"Mary—would you—have minded?" he said.

There was a long interval before she answered.

"Yes."

"Then why——"

"Yes, Bibbs?"

"Mary—I've seen you from my window at home—only

five times since I—since then. You looked—oh, how can I tell you? It was like a man chained in a cave catching a glimpse of the blue sky, Mary. Mary, won't you—let me see you again—near? I think I could make you really forgive me—you'd have to——"

"I *did*—then."

"No—not really—or you wouldn't have said you couldn't see me any more."

"That wasn't the reason." The voice was very low.

"Mary," he said, even more tremulously than before, "I can't—you *couldn't* mean it was because—you can't mean it was because you—care?"

There was no answer.

"Mary?" he called, huskily. "If you mean *that*—you'd let me see you—wouldn't you?"

And now the voice was so low he could not be sure it spoke at all, but if it did, the words were, "Yes, Bibbs—dear."

But the voice was not in the instrument—it was so gentle and so light, so almost nothing, it seemed to be made of air—and it came from the air.

Slowly and incredulously he turned—and glory fell upon his shining eyes. The door of his father's room had opened.

Mary stood upon the threshold.

PART THREE

NATIONAL AVENUE

CHAPTER I

THE imperfect vision of Bibbs Sheridan, when there was still a little poet left in the man of business, had glimpsed a hint of definite intention in Bigness. Bibbs dreamily imagined that after all the god might have a mind of his own above the turmoil, and might all the while be shaping something. In a word, the huge disorderliness might be order leading to a beauty always intended. Even then there was a more fanatical priest than Sheridan, and if Bigness was really engaged in an orderly shaping, this chief fanatic and chief priest was the god's great agent and was purposefully inspired. Thus Dan Oliphant becomes of the first importance.

People used to say of the two Oliphant brothers that Harlan Oliphant looked as if he lived in the Oliphants' house, but Dan didn't. This was a poor sort of information to anyone who had never seen the house, but of course the supposition was that everybody had seen it and was familiar with its significance. It stood in a great, fine yard, in that row of great, fine yards at the upper end of National Avenue, before the avenue swung off obliquely and changed its name to Amberson Boulevard. The houses in the long row were such houses as are built no more; bricklayers worked for a dollar a day and the workman's day was ten hours long when National Avenue grew into its glory. Those houses were of a big-walled solidity to withstand time, fire, and tornado, but they found another assailant not to be resisted by anything; this conqueror, called Progress, being the growth of the city. Until the growth came they were indomitable and fit for the centuries.

Moreover, they were of a dignified spaciousness not now to be accomplished except by millionaires with wives content to spend their days getting new servants. The New Yorker, admitted to these interiors upon a visit westward, discovered

an amplitude with which he had little familiarity at home, where the brownstone fronts and squeezed apartments showed him no such suites of big rooms; for, of all the million people in New York, only a dozen families could have houses comparable in size or stateliness. "Stately" was the word, though here some little care must be taken, of course, with an eye to those who will not admit that anything short of Blenheim or the Luxembourg is stately. The stateliness of the Oliphants' house was precisely the point in that popular discrimination between the two young men who lived there: Harlan Oliphant, like the house, was supposed to partake of this high quality, but stateliness was the last thing anyone ever thought of in connection with Dan.

The youth of the brothers, in the happy and comfortable nineties of the last century, is well remembered in their city where the Christmas holidays could never be thought really begun till the two Oliphants had arrived from college and their broad-shouldered, long-tailed coats and incredibly high white collars were seen officially moving in the figures of a cotillion. They usually arrived on the same day, though often not by the same train; but this was the mark of no disagreement or avoidance of each other, yet bore some significance upon the difference between them. It was the fashion to say of them that never were two brothers so alike yet so unlike; and although both were tall, with blue eyes, brown hair, and features of pleasant contour decisively outlined in what is called a family likeness, people who knew them well found it a satisfying and insoluble puzzle that they were the offspring of the same father and mother.

The contrast appeared in childhood and was manifest to even the casual onlooker when Dan Oliphant was eleven or twelve years old and Harlan ten or eleven. At that age Harlan was already an aristocrat, and, what is more remarkable, kept himself immaculate always. If his collar rumpled or was soiled he went immediately to his room and got a fresh one; he washed his hands three or four times a day without parental suggestion and he brushed his hair almost every time he

washed his hands. He was fastidious in his choice of companions, had no taste for chance acquaintances, and on a school holiday could most frequently be found in the library at home, reading a book beyond his years. The lively Daniel, on the contrary, disported himself about the neighbourhood —or about other neighbourhoods, for that matter—in whatever society offered him any prospect of gayety. He played marbles "for keeps" with ragtag and bobtail on every vacant lot in town; he never washed his hands or face, or brushed his hair, except upon repeated command, yet loved water well enough to "run off swimming" and dive through a film of ice upon an early Saturday in March. He regaled himself with horse-play up and down the alleys and had long talks with negro coachmen in their stables, acquiring strange wisdom of them; he learned how to swear with some intricacy, how to smoke almost anything not fireproof, how to "inhale," how to gamble with implements more sophisticated than marbles, and how to keep all these accomplishments from the knowledge of his parents. He kept them from Harlan's knowledge, also, though not out of any fear that Harlan would "tell."

At some time in their early childhood the brothers had made the discovery that they were uncongenial. This is not to say that they were unamiable together, but that they had assumed a relation not wholly unknown among brothers. They spoke to each other when it was necessary; but usually, if they happened to find themselves together, they were silent, each apparently unconscious of the other's presence. Sometimes, though rarely, they had a short argument, seldom upon a subject of great importance; and only once did a difference between them attain the dimensions of a quarrel.

This was on a summer day of feverish temperature, and the heat may have had something to do with the emotion displayed by young Daniel, then aged twelve. He was engaged, that afternoon, with a business friend, Master Sam Kohn, and they were importantly busy in a latticed summer-house, an ornament of the commodious lawn. They had entered into a partnership for the sale of "Fancy Brackets and Fittings,"

which they manufactured out of old cigar boxes, with the aid of glue, a jig-saw, and blue paint. The computed profits were already enormous, though no sales had been attempted, since the glue was slow to harden on such a hot day; and the partners worked diligently, glad to shed their perspiration for the steadily increasing means to obtain riches.

At five o'clock Harlan dropped lightly from the big stone-trimmed bay window of the library, crossed the lawn, where the grass was being gilded now by the westering sun, and halted before the entrance of the summer-house. He was the picture of a cool young gentleman, perfect in white linen; his coat and trousers of this pleasant material were unflawed by wrinkle or stain; his patent-leather pumps, unmarred by the slightest crack, glittered among the short green blades of grass; his small black satin tie was as smooth as his brown hair.

To this perfection the busy partners within the summer-house were a sufficient contrast. Soiled blue upon every available surface, they continued their labours, paying no visible attention to the cold-eyed young observer, but consulting each other perhaps the more importantly because of the presence of an audience, however skeptical. Master Kohn, swarthy, bow-legged, and somewhat undersized for his thirteen years, was in fact pleased to be associated with the superior Harlan, even so tenuously. He was pleased, also, to be a partner of Dan's, though this was no great distinction, because Dan, as the boys' world knew, would willingly be friendly (or even intimate) with anybody, and consequently no social advancement was to be obtained through him. That commodity is to be had of only those who decline to deal in it, and thus Sam Kohn felt that he was becoming imbued with a certain amount of superiority because Harlan Oliphant had come to look on at the work.

Sam decided to make a suggestion. "Look at your brother," he said to Dan. "Maybe he'd like to git into our partnership. We could give him a share, if he starts in fresh and works hard."

"Thanks!" Harlan said with cold sarcasm, and addressed his brother: "Do you know what time it is and what the family is supposed to do this evening?"

"Yes," Dan answered, not looking up from his jig-saw. "We're goin' to dinner at grandma Savage's."

"Mother sent me to tell you it's time for you to come in and wash yourself and dress up," said Harlan. "The mess you've got yourself in, it'll take you till after six o'clock, and we're supposed to be there then."

"Sam and I got some pretty important jobs to finish," Dan returned carelessly. "I got plenty time to change my clo'es and get washed up."

"No, you haven't. You quit playing with that boy and those dirty things and go in the house."

Upon this, Dan stopped the operation of the jig-saw and looked at his brother in a puzzled way. "What you mean callin' our brackets and fittin's 'dirty things'?" he inquired. "I expect you don't hardly realize Sam Kohn and I got a regular factory here, Harlan."

"A 'factory,' is it?" said Harlan, and laughed in the manner of a contemptuous adult. "Well, you close up your old factory and come in the house and get ready."

"I can't for a while," Dan returned, beginning his work with the jig-saw again. "I told you we got lots to do before we quit to-night."

"You stop playing with that silly little saw," Harlan said sharply, for he had begun to feel some irritation. "You come in the house right this instant."

"No, I can't yet, Harlan. Sam and I got to——"

"Never mind!" Harlan interrupted. "You come in the house and let this boy go home."

There was a frosty sharpness in his way of saying "let this boy go home" that caused Dan to stop his work again and stare at his brother challengingly. "Here!" he exclaimed. "This is as much my father and mother's yard as it is yours, and you got no business hintin' at any friend of mine to go home."

"Haven't I?" Harlan inquired, adopting a light mockery. "So this is a friend of yours is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Oh, a *friend?*" Harlan mocked. "Oh, *excuse* me! I didn't understand!"

This proved to be intolerably provocative;—Dan abandoned the jig-saw and stepped out of the summer-house to confront his brother frowningly. "You shut up, Harlan Oliphant," he said. "This is Sam Kohn's and my factory, and he's got a right here. You quit your talkin' so much around here."

"You quit your own talking," Harlan retorted. "You do what mother sent me to tell you to, and let that dirty little Jew go home!"

"What?" Dan cried.

"You better!" Harlan said, standing his ground, though Dan lifted his hand threateningly. "We don't want any dirty little Jews on our premises."

Dan gulped. "It isn't his fault he's a Jew. You take that back!"

"I won't," said Harlan. "He *is* little and he *is* dirty and he's a Jew. How you going to deny it?"

Flushed with anger and greatly perplexed, Dan glanced over his shoulder at Master Kohn, who looked on with an inscrutable expression. "Well, what if I can't?" Dan said desperately, after this glance at his guest and partner. "You got no right to insult him."

"It isn't an insult if it's true, is it?"

"Yes, it is; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I got a notion—I got a notion——"

"What notion have you got?" Harlan asked scornfully, as his brother paused, swallowing heavily.

"I got a notion to make you ashamed!"

"How would you do it?"

"'How?' I'll show you how!" And again Dan's clenched right hand lowered threateningly. The brothers stood eye to eye, and both faces were red.

"Go on," said Harlan. "Hit me!"

Dan's fist, like his expression, wavered for a moment, then he said: "Well, I wish you weren't my brother; but you are, and I won't hit you."

"I thought you wouldn't," Harlan retorted, turning toward the house. "I guess I'll have to tell mother you won't wash yourself and dress until she comes and sends this dirty little Jew out of our yard."

Thus, having discovered the tender spot in his opponent's sensibilities, he avenged himself for the threat, and went on. His brother moved impulsively, as if to follow and punish, but Mrs. Oliphant had long ago impressed her sons heavily with the story of Cain and Abel, and he halted, while Harlan went on coolly and disappeared into the house by a side entrance.

"Dog-gone you!" Dan muttered; then turned back to the factory, where Master Kohn, his head down and his hands in his pockets, was scuffing sawdust meditatively with the soles of his shoes. Dan likewise scuffed sawdust for a time.

"Well," Sam Kohn said finally, "I guess I better go on home before your mamma comes to turn me out."

"I don't guess she would," Dan said, not looking at him, but keeping his gaze upon his own scuffing shoe. "She's got a good deal o' politeness about her, and I don't guess she would. You got a right to stay here long as you want, Sammy. It's half your factory."

"Not if your family puts me out, it ain't."

"He had no business to call you that, Sammy."

"To call me which?"

"A—a Jew," said Dan, still keeping his eyes upon the ground.

"Why, I am a Jew."

"Well, maybe; but——" Dan paused uncomfortably, then continued: "Well, he didn't have any right to call you one."

"Yes, he had," Sam returned, to his friend's surprise. "He could call me a Jew just the same I could call you English."

"English? I'm not English."

"Well, you're *from* English."

"No," Dan protested mildly. "Not for a couple o' hundred years, anyway."

"Well, I ain't from Jews a couple thousand years, maybe."

"But I'm full-blooded American," said Dan.

"So'm I," Sam insisted. "You're American from English, and I'm American from Jews. He's got a right to call me a Jew."

Dan stared at him incredulously. "Don't you mind it?"

"Yes," Sam admitted, "I do when he says it for a insult. He's got a right to call me a Jew, but he hasn't got no right to call me a Jew for a insult."

"Well, he did," Dan remarked gloomily. "He meant it the way you might call somebody 'Irish' or 'Dutchy' or 'Nigger.'"

"I know it. He called me dirty and little, too. Well, I am little, but I ain't no dirtier than what you are, Dan, and you're his own brother."

"Well, then, you oughtn't to mind his callin' you dirty, Sam."

"He wouldn't call you dirty the same way he would me," Sam returned shrewdly; and then, after a momentary pause, he sighed and turned to go.

But that sigh of his, which had in it the quality of patience, strongly affected Dan's sympathies, for a reason he could not have explained. "Don't go, Sammy," he said. "You don't have to go just because he——"

"Yeh, I better," Sam said, not looking back, but continuing to move toward the distant gate. "I better go before your mamma comes to put me out."

Dan protested again, but Sam shook his head and went on across the lawn, his hands in his pockets, his head down. The high iron fence, painted white, culminated in an elaborate gateway, and, when Sam passed out to the sidewalk there, the iron gateposts rose far above him. Plodding out between these high white posts, the shabby little figure did not lack pathos;

nor was pathos absent from it as it went doggedly down the street in the thinning gold of the late afternoon sunshine. Sam looked back not once; but Dan watched him until he was out of sight, then returned to the interior of the summer-house, sat down, and stared broodingly at the littered floor. The floor was not what he saw, however, for his actual eyes were without vision just then, and it was his mind's eye that was busy. It dwelt upon the picture of the exiled Sam Kohn departing forlornly, and the longer it thus dwelt the warmer and more threatening grew a painful feeling that seemed to locate itself in Dan's upper chest, not far below his collar bone.

This feeling remained there while he dressed; and it was still there when he sat down at his grandmother's table for dinner. In fact, it so increased in poignancy that he could not eat with his customary heartiness; and his lack of appetite, though he made play with seemingly busy fork and spoon to cover it, fell under the sharp eye of the lady at the head of the table. She was a handsome, dominant old woman, with high colour in her cheeks at seventy-eight, and thick hair, darker than it was gray, under her lace cap. She sat straight upright in her stiff chair, for she detested easy-chairs and had never in all her life lounged in one or sat with her knees crossed; such things were done not by ladies, but by hoodlums, she said. Her husband, a gentle, submissive old man, was frail and bent with his years, though they had brought him great worldly prosperity; and the grandchildren of this couple never spoke of the house as "Grandpa Savage's," but always as "Grandma Savage's," an intuitive discrimination that revealed the rulership. Mrs. Savage ruled by means of a talent she had for destructive criticism, which several times prevented her optimistic husband from venturing into ruin, and had established her as the voice of wisdom.

"Daniel," she said presently;—"you're not eating."

"Yes, I am, grandma."

"No. Ever since you came to the table, you've been sitting there with your head bent down like that and moving your

hands to pretend you're eating, but not eating. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'," he muttered, not lifting his head. "I'm all right."

"Adelaide," Mrs. Savage said to his mother;—"has his appetite been failing lately?"

"Why, no, mamma," Mrs. Oliphant answered. She was a pretty woman, quietly cheerful and little given to alarms or anxieties. "Not seriously," she added, smiling. "He did very well at lunch, at least."

"He looks sickish," said Mrs. Savage grimly. "He looks as if he were beginning a serious illness. Well people don't sit with their heads down like that. What is the matter with you, Daniel?"

"Nothin'," he said. "I told you I'm all right."

"He isn't though," Mrs. Savage insisted, addressing the others. "Do you know what's the matter with him, Harlan?"

"Too much glue, I expect."

"What?"

"Too much glue," Harlan repeated. "He was playing with a lot of nasty glue and paint all afternoon, and I expect the smell's made him sick. Too much glue and too much Jew."

"Jew?" his grandmother inquired. "What do you mean by 'too much Jew,' Harlan?"

"He had a dirty little bow-legged Jew playing with him."

"See here!" Dan said huskily, but he did not look up. "You be careful!"

"Careful of what?" Harlan inquired scornfully.

"Careful of what you say."

"Daniel, were you playing with a Jew?" his grandmother asked.

"Yes, I was."

He still did not look up, but his voice had a tone, plaintive and badgered, that attracted the attention of his grandfather, and the old gentleman interposed soothingly: "Don't let 'em fret you, Dannie. It wasn't particularly wicked of you to play with a Jew, I expect."

"No," said Dan's father. "I don't believe I'd let myself be much worried over that, if I were you, Dan."

"No?" said Mrs. Savage, and inquired further, somewhat formidably: "You don't prefer your sons to choose companions from their own circle, Henry Oliphant?"

"Oh, yes, I do, ma'am," he returned amiably. "As a general thing I believe it's better for them to be intimate with the children of their mother's and father's old family friends; but at the same time I hope Dan and Harlan won't forget that we live in a country founded on democratic principles. The population seems to me to begin to show signs of altering with emigration from Europe; and it's no harm for the boys to know something of the new elements, though for that matter we've always had Jews, and they're certainly not bad citizens. I don't see any great harm in Dan's playing a little with a Jewish boy, if he wants to."

"I wasn't playin'," Dan said.

"Weren't you?" his father asked. "What were you doing?"

"We were—we were manufacturing. We were manufacturing useful articles."

"What were they?"

"Ornamental brackets to nail on walls and put things on. We were goin' to make good money out of it."

"Well, that was all right," Mr. Oliphant said genially. "Not a bad idea at all. You're all right, Dannie."

Unfortunately, a word of sympathy often undermines the composure of the recipient; and upon this Dan's lower lip began to quiver, though he inclined his head still farther to conceal the new tokens of his agitation.

He was not aided by his coolly observant young brother. "Going to cry about it?" Harlan asked, quietly amused.

"You let Dannie alone," said the grandfather; whereupon Harlan laughed. "You ought to see what he and his little Jew partner called brackets!" he said. "Dan's always thinking he's making something, and it's always something just awful. What he and that Sam Kohn were really making to-day was a horrible mess of our summer-house. It'll take a week's work

for somebody to get it cleaned up, and he got mad at me and was going to hit me because mamma sent me to tell him to come in the house and get ready for dinner."

"I did not," Dan muttered.

"You didn't? Didn't you act like you were going to hit me?"

"Yes," Dan said. "But it wasn't because what you say. It was because you called Sam names."

"I didn't."

"You did!" And now Dan looked up, showing eyes that glistened along the lower lids. "You—you hurt his feelings."

Harlan had the air of a self-contained person who begins to be exasperated by a persistent injustice, and he appealed to the company. "I told him time and again mamma wanted him to come in and get ready to come here for dinner, and he simply wouldn't do it."

Mrs. Savage shook her head. "I've always told you," she said to her daughter, "you'll repent bitterly some day for your lack of discipline with your children. You're not raising them the way I raised mine, and some day——"

But Harlan had not finished his explanation. "So, after I waited and waited," he continued, "and they just went on messing up our summer-house, I told him he'd better come in and let the dirty little Jew boy go home. That's all I said, and he was going to hit me for it."

"You—you hurt his fuf-feelings," Dan stammered, as his emotion increased. "I told you, you hurt his *feelings!*"

"Pooh!" Harlan returned lightly. "What feelings has he got? He wouldn't be around where he doesn't belong if he had any."

"I asked him there," Dan said, the tears in his eyes overflowing as he spoke; and he began to grope hurriedly through his various pockets for a handkerchief. "He had a right to be where he was invited, didn't he? You—you called him——"

"I said he was just exactly what he is, and if he ever comes around our yard again, I'll say it again."

"No, you won't!"

"Oh, yes, I will," Harlan said with perfect composure; and this evidence that he believed himself in the right and would certainly carry out his promise was too much for the suffering Dan, who startled his relatives by unexpectedly sobbing aloud.

"You dog-gone old *thing!*" he cried, his shoulders heaving and his voice choked with the half-swallowed tears in his throat. "I *will* hit you now!" He rose, making blind sweeps with both arms in the direction of Harlan, and, in a kind of anguish, gurgling out imprecations and epithets that shocked his family; but Mr. Oliphant caught the flailing hands, took the boy by the shoulders and impelled him from the room, going with him. A moment or two later the passionate voice ceased to be coherent; plaintive sounds were heard, growing fainter with increasing distance; and Mr. Oliphant, slightly flushed, returned to finish his dinner.

"I sent him home," he explained. "He'll probably feel better, out in the dark alone."

"And may I inquire, Henry Oliphant," said the old lady at the head of the table;—"is that all you intend to do about it?"

"Well, I might talk to him after he cools off a little."

"Yes, I suppose that will be all!" Mrs. Savage returned with a short laugh, emphatically one of disapproval. "It's a fine generation you modern people are raising. When I was fifteen I was supposed to be a woman, but my father whipped me for a slight expression of irreverence on Sunday."

"I'm sorry to hear it, ma'am," her son-in-law said genially.

"I'm not sorry it happened," she informed him, not relaxing. "Such things were part of a discipline that made a strong people."

"Yes, ma'am; I've no doubt it's to your generation we owe what the country is to-day."

"And it's your generation that's going to let it go to the dogs!" the old lady retorted sharply. "May I ask what you intend to do to protect Harlan when you go home and his brother attacks him?"

But at this Oliphant laughed. "Dan won't attack him. By the time we get home Dan will probably be in bed."

"Then he'll attack Harlan to-morrow."

"No, he won't, ma'am. I don't say Dan won't sleep on a damp pillow to-night, the way he was going on, but by to-morrow he'll have forgotten all about it."

"He won't," she declared. "A child can't have a passion like that, with its parents doing nothing to discipline it, and then just forget. Harlan only did his duty, but Dan will attack him again the first chance he gets. You'll see!"

Oliphant was content to let her have the last word—perhaps because he knew she would have it in any event—so he laughed again, placatively, and began to talk with his father-in-law of what Major Amberson thought of Mr. Blaine's chances at the approaching national convention; while Mrs. Savage shook her gloomy, handsome head and made evident her strong opinion that the episode was anything but closed. There would always henceforth be hatred between the two brothers, she declared to her daughter, whom she succeeded in somewhat depressing.

But as a prophet she appeared before long to have failed, at least in regard to the predicted feeling between her two grandsons. Dan may have slept on his wrath, but he did not cherish it; and the next day his relations with Harlan were as usual. The unarmed neutrality, which was not precisely a mutual ignoring, was resumed and continued. It continued, indeed, throughout the youth of the brothers; and prevailed with them during their attendance at the university at New Haven, whither they went in imitation of their father before them. The studious Harlan matriculated in company with his older brother; they were classmates, though not roommates; and peace was still prevalent between them when they graduated. Nevertheless, in considering and comprehending the career of a man like Daniel Oliphant, certain boyhood episodes appear to shed a light, and the conflict over little Sammy Kohn bears some significance.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS not altogether without difficulty that the older of the brothers graduated. Harlan obtained a diploma inscribed with a special bit of classic praise, for he was an "Honour Man"; but Daniel trod the primrose way a little too gaily as a junior and as a senior. Anxiety had sometimes been felt at home, though knowledge of this was kept from old Mrs. Savage; and Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant were relieved of a strain when Dan was granted his degree at a most reluctant eleventh hour, and telegraphed them:

> Last prof to hold out gave up after I talked to him all afternoon and said I could have diploma if I would quit arguing.

Thus the two young bachelors of arts came forth together into a pleasant world, of which they already knew somewhat less than they supposed they did.

The world for them, in that day, which the newspapers were beginning to call *fin de siècle*, included rather sketchily London, Paris, Florence, and a part of the Alps, for they had spent two vacations abroad with their parents; but in the main the field of action to which they emerged from the campus consisted of their own city and New York. No sooner were they out of the university than they began the series of returns eastward that was part of the life of every affluent young midland graduate. They went back for the football games, for class dinners, for baseball and boat races, and commencement. New York was their playground as they went and came; and they remained there to play for months at a time.

It was a pleasanter playground in those days than it is now, when even the honeycombed ground under foot has its

massacres, and the roaring surface congests with multitude on multitude till fires must burn and patients must die, since neither firemen nor doctors may pass. For the growth came upon New York as it came upon the midland cities, and it produced a glutted monster, able to roar and heave and mangle, but not to digest or even to swallow the swarms that came begging to be devoured. In the change there perished something romantic and charming, something that a true poet used to call Bagdad.

So far as it concerned Mr. Daniel Oliphant, aged twenty-six, New York was romantic Bagdad enough when the jingling harness began to glitter in the park and on the Avenue in the afternoon, and he would go out from the Holland House to see the pretty women, all beautifully dressed, he thought, and wearing clumps of violets, or orchids, as they reclined in their Victorias drawn by high-stepping horses. Dan liked to watch, too, the handsome grooms and coachmen in their liveries, with cockaded silk hats, white breeches, top boots, and blue coats; for they were the best-dressed men in the town, he thought, and he often wished he knew whether they were really as haughty as the horses they drove or only affected to be so proud professionally.

In New York, this Daniel took some thought to his own tailoring and haberdashing; he would even add a camellia to the lapel of his frock coat when he strolled down to lounge in the doorway of the great Fifth Avenue Hotel and stare at the procession of lovely girls from everywhere in the country, their faces rosy in the wind, as they walked up Broadway after an autumn matinée. Then he would join the procession, a friend accoutred like himself being usually with him, and they would accompany the procession sedately in its swing up the Avenue; sometimes leaving it, however, at the magnificent new Waldorf, where the men's café offered them refreshment among lively companions. In truth, this congenial resort had too great an attraction for the amiable Dan, and so did the room with the big mirror behind the office at the Holland House. Moreover, when he spoke of

Daly's, he did not always mean Mr. Augustin Daly's theatre, though he preferred it to the other theatres; sometimes he meant a Daly's where adventure was to be obtained by anyone who cared to bet he could guess when a marble would stop rolling upon a painted disk.

Of course he made excursions into the Bowery, waltzed and two-stepped at the Haymarket after long dinners at clubs, fell asleep in hansom cabs at sunrise, and conducted himself in general about as did any other "rather wild young man," native or alien, in the metropolis. There were droves of such young men, and, like most of the others, Dan frequently became respectable, and went to a dinner or a dance at the house of a classmate; he was even seen at church in the pew of a Madison Avenue family of known severity. However, no one was puzzled by this act of devotion, for Lena McMillan, the daughter of the severe house, was pretty enough to be the explanation for anything.

Her brother George, lacking the severity of other McMillans, and as unobtrusive as possible in advertising that lack, was one of Dan's chance acquaintances during a Bagdadian night. At the conclusion of many festivities, the chance acquaintance murmured his address, but Dan comprehended the unwisdom of a sunrise return of so flaccid a young gentleman into a house as formidable as the McMillans' appeared to be, when the night-hawk hansom stopped before it; and the driver was instructed to go on to the Holland House. Young McMillan woke at noon in Dan's room there; shuddered to think that but for a Good Samaritan this waking might have taken place at home, and proved himself first grateful, then devoted. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship; and he took Dan to tea in Madison Avenue that afternoon.

Something withholding about the McMillans reminded their guest of his brother Harlan; and probably Dan would have defined this as "an air of reserve"; but it was more than reserve, deeper than reserve, as in time he discovered. George McMillan alone seemed to have none of it; on the contrary,

his air was habitually friendly and apologetic—possibly because of what he knew about himself and what his family didn't. Mrs. McMillan and her daughters found it unnecessary either to smile or offer their hands when George presented the good-looking young Midlander, nor did they seem to believe themselves committed to any effort to make the stranger feel at home in their long, dark drawing-room.

They gave him a cup of tea and a bit of toast, and that appeared to be the end of their obligation to a stray guest, for they at once continued a conversation begun before his arrival, not addressing themselves to him or even looking at him. Mrs. McMillan's cousin's husband, named Oliver, he gathered, was about to be offered a position in the cabinet at Washington, and Mrs. McMillan hoped Oliver wouldn't accept, because Milly and Anna and Charlotte, persons unknown to Dan, would have to give up so much if they went to live in Washington instead of Boston. If it were an ambassadorship the President wanted Oliver for, that would be better, especially on Charlotte's account.

The guest began to have an uncomfortable feeling that he must be invisible;—no one seemed to know that he was present, not even the grateful George, who was feeble that afternoon and looked distrustfully at his tea, of which he partook with an air of foreboding. Dan could not help meditating upon what a difference there would have been if the position were reversed, with George as the guest and himself as the host. Dan thought of it: how heartily his mother and father would have shaken hands with the young Easterner, welcoming him, doing every reassuring thing they could to make him feel at home, talking cordial generalities until they could get better acquainted and find what interested him. But although Dan felt awkward and even a little resentful, it was not the first time he had been exposed to this type of hospitality, and he was able to accept it as the custom of the country. He made the best of it and was philosophic, thinking that the McMillans had given tea to a great many stray young men of whom they knew nothing, and saw once

but usually never again. Also, it was a pleasure to look at Lena McMillan, even though she was so genuinely unaware of him.

Outwardly, at least, she was unlike her mother and older sister. Mrs. McMillan was a large woman, shapely, but rather stony—or so she appeared to Dan—and her hair rose above her broad pink forehead as a small dome of trim gray curls, not to be imagined as ever being disarranged or uncurled or otherwise than as they were. She and her older daughter, who resembled her, both wore black of an austere fashionableness; but the younger Miss McMillan had alleviated her own dark gown with touches of blue—not an impertinent blue, but a blue darkly effective; and, with what seemed almost levity in this heavy old drawing-room, she wore Italian earrings of gold and lapis lazuli. Her mother did not approve of these; no one except opera singers wore earrings, Mrs. McMillan had told her before the arrival of the two young men.

Lena was sometimes defined as a "*petite brunette*," and sometimes as a "perfectly beautiful French doll"; for she had to perfection a doll's complexion and eyelashes; but beyond this point the latter definition was unfair, since dolls are usually thought wanting in animation, a quality she indeed possessed. Dan Oliphant, watching her, thought he had never before met so sparkling a creature; and a glamour stole over him. He began to think she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

Possibly she became aware of the favour with which he was regarding her, for although her shoulder and profile were toward him, and for twenty minutes and more she seemed to be as unconscious of his presence as her mother and older sister really were, she finally gave him a glance and spoke to him. "George tells me you're from the West," she said.

"No. Not very," he returned.

"Not very west?"

"I mean not from the Far West," Dan explained. "Out there they'd call me an Easterner, of course."

"Gracious!" she cried incredulously. "Would they, really?"

Already he thought her a wonderful being, but at this he showed some spirit. "I'm afraid so," he said.

She laughed, not offended, and exclaimed: "Oh, so you don't *mind* being a Westerner! I only meant you people are so funny about rubbing in the letter *R* and overdoing the short *A* that no one can ever make a mistake about which of the provinces you belong in. I've been in the West, myself —rather west, that is. I didn't care for it much."

"Where was it?"

"Rochester. I believe you're from farther out, aren't you? Perhaps you can tell me if it's true, what we hear things are like beyond Rochester."

"Things beyond Rochester?" he asked, mystified. "What sort of things do you mean?"

"All sorts," she answered. "I've always heard that when you get west of Rochester every house has a room you people call a 'sitting-room,' and you always keep a sewing-machine in it and apples on a centre table, and all the men keep tobacco in their cheeks and say, 'Wa'al, no, ma'am,' and 'Why, certainly, ma'am,' and 'Yes, *ma'am!*' Isn't that what it's like?"

"Who told you so?"

"Oh, I had a cousin who used to visit people out there. She said it was funny but dreadful. Isn't it?"

"I wish you'd come and see," he said earnestly. "I wish you and your brother'd come and let me show you."

"Good heavens," she cried;—"but you're hospitable! Do you always ask everybody to visit you after they've said two words to you?"

"No, not everybody," he returned, and on the impulse continued: "I'd ask *you*, though, after you'd said *one* word to me." And because he meant it, he instantly became red.

"Good heavens!" she cried again, and stared at him thoughtfully, perceiving without difficulty his heightened

colour. "Is that the way they talk in the West, Mr.—uh——"

"Oliphant," he said.

"What?"

"My name's Oliphant," he informed her apologetically. "You called me Mister Uh."

"I see," she said, and as her attention was caught just then by something her sister was saying about Milly and Anna and Charlotte and Oliver, she turned from him to say something more, herself, about Milly and Anna and Charlotte and Oliver. Then, having turned away from him, she turned not back again, but seemed to have forgotten him.

The son of the house presently took him away, the mother and her older daughter murmuring carelessly as the two young men rose to go, while Lena said more distinctly, "Good afternoon, Mister Uh." But the unfortunate Daniel carried with him a picture that remained tauntingly before his mind's eye; and he decided to stay in New York a little longer, though he had written his father that he would leave for home the next day. He had been stricken at first sight.

He could not flatter himself that she had bestowed a thought upon him. On the contrary, he told himself that his impetuosity had made headway backwards; and he was as greatly astonished as he was delighted when George McMillan came to see him two afternoons later, at the Holland House, and brought him a card for a charity ball at the Metropolitan. "We had some extra ones," George said. "Lena thought you might like to come."

"She did? Why, I—I——" Dan was breathless at once.

"What?"

"Why, I didn't think she noticed I was on earth. This is perfectly beautiful of her!"

"Why, no," George assured him; "it's nothing at all. We had four or five cards we really didn't know what to do with. There'll be an awful crowd there, all kinds of people."

"Yes, I know; but it was just beautiful of her to think of

me." And Dan added solemnly: "That sister of yours reminds me of a flower."

"She does?" George said, visibly surprised. "You mean Lena?"

"Yes, I do. She's like the most perfect flower that ever blossomed."

"That's strange news to me," said George. "Then maybe you'd be willing to come to the house to dinner and go to this show with the family. Heaven knows I'd like to have you; it might help me to sneak out after we get 'em there. You sure you could stand it?"

"I should consider it the greatest privilege of my life," said Dan.

"Heavens, but you're solemn!" his caller exclaimed. "You make me feel at home—I mean, as if I were at home with my solemn family. Wait till you meet some of the others —and my father. He's the solemnest. In fact, they're all solemn except Lena. There's only one trouble with Lena."

"What is it?"

"The poor thing hasn't got any sense," Lena's brother said lightly. "Never did. Never will have. Otherwise she's charming—when she's in a mood to be!"

Evidently Lena was in a mood to be charming that night; she sat next to Dan at the solemn dinner and chattered to him gaily, though in a lowered voice, for George had not exaggerated when he spoke of his father. If she was a French doll, she was at least a radiant one in her ball gown of heavy ivory silk, and it was a thrilled young Midlander indeed who took her lightly in his arms for a two-step when they came out upon the dancing floor that had been laid over the chairs at the opera house. "It was nice of you to send me these flowers," she said, as he dexterously moved her through the crowd of other two-steppers. "They'd tell anybody you're Western, if nothing else would. Western men always send orchids. But then, of course, nobody'd need to be told you're from out there. You tell them yourself."

"You mean I always mention it?"

"No," she laughed;—"your dialect does. The way you pronounce *R* and *A*, and slide your words together."

"I've got a brother that doesn't," said Dan. "He talks the way you and your family do; he says 'lahst' and 'fahst' and calls father 'fathuh' and New York 'New Yawk,' and keeps all his words separated. He began it when he was about fifteen and he's stuck to it ever since. Says he doesn't do it to be English, but because it's correct pronunciation. I expect you'd like him."

At that she looked up at him suddenly, and he was shown an inscrutable depth of dark blue glance that shook his heart. "I like *you!*" she said.

"Do you?" he gasped. "You didn't seem to, that day I met you."

She laughed. "I didn't decide I liked you till after you'd gone. You aren't quite cut to the pattern of most of the men I know. There's something hearty about your looks; and I like your broad shoulders and your not seeming to have put a sleek surface over you. At least it's pleasant for a change."

"Is that all?" he asked, a little disappointed. "Just for a change?"

"Never mind. Is there anybody else in your family besides your brother?"

"Heavens, yes! To begin with, I've got a grand old grandmother; she's over ninety, but she's the head of the family all right! Then there's my father and mother——"

"What are they like?"

"My mother's beautiful," Dan said. "She's just the loveliest, kindest person in the world, and so's my father. He's a lawyer."

"What are you?"

"I'm nothin' at all yet. So far, I've just been helpin' my grandmother settle up my grandfather's estate. Somebody had to, and my brother's in my father's office."

"And do your grandmother and your mother have sitting-rooms with sewing-machines in them?"

"I wish you'd come and see."

"Do you?" She had continued to look at him, and now her eyes almost deliberately became dreamy. "I might—if you keep on asking me," she said gravely. "I'm sure I'd hate the West, though."

"Yet, you might come?"

"Ask me again to-morrow."

He was but too glad to be obedient, and asked her again the next day. This was over a table for two at a restaurant on Lafayette Place, where she met him as a surreptitious adventure, suggested by herself and undertaken without notifying her mother. It was a Lochinvar courtship, she said afterward, thus implying that her share in it was passive, though there were indeed days when the young man out of the West found her not merely passive, but dreamily indifferent. And once or twice she was more than that, puzzling and grieving him by an inexplicable coldness almost like anger, so that he consulted George McMillan to find out what could be the matter.

"Moods," George told him. "She's nothing but moods. Just has 'em; that's all. It doesn't matter how you are to her; sometimes she'll treat you like an angel and sometimes like the dickens. It doesn't depend on anything you do."

Dan thought her all the more fascinating, and put off his return home another month, to the increasing mystification of his family, for this month included the Christmas holidays, and Mrs. Oliphant wrote that they all missed him, and that Mrs. Savage really needed him. The McMillans, on the other hand, were not mystified, and Lena appeared to be able to control them. The manner of her parents and her sister toward the suitor was one of endurance—an endurance that intended to be as thoroughbred as it could, but was nevertheless evident. It had no discouraging effect on the ardent young man, who took it as a privilege to be endured by beings so close to her. Besides, George McMillan was helpful with the exalted family, for he showed both tact and sympathy, though the latter sometimes appeared to consist of a compassionate amusement; and once he went

so far as to ask Dan, laughingly, if he were quite sure he knew what he was doing.

"Am I *sure?*" Dan repeated incredulously. "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean about Lena."

"To me," Dan said, with the solemnity he had come to use in speaking of her, "your sister Lena is the finest flower of womanhood ever created!"

Upon that, his friend stared at him and saw that his eyes were bright with a welling moisture, so deep was his worship; and George was himself affected.

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it," he said, "I guess it'll be all right. I'm sure it will. You're a mighty right chap, I think."

"I?" Dan exclaimed. "I'm nothin' at all! And when I think that your sister could stoop—could *stoop* to—to *me*—why, I——"

He was overcome and could not go on.

The end of it was that when he went home in February it was to acquaint his family with the fact of his engagement; and in spite of his happiness he was a little uneasy. He did not fear the interview with his father and mother; and though he disliked the prospect of talking about Lena with Harlan, who was sure to be critical and superior, he had learned to get along without Harlan's approval. What made him uneasy was his anticipation of the invincible pessimism of that iron old lady, his grandmother.

CHAPTER III

THE Oliphants' high white iron fence was a hundred and fifty feet long on National Avenue, a proud frontage, but the next yard to the north had one even prouder: it was of a hundred and eighty feet, and the big house that stood in this yard was almost that far back from the street. Built of brick and painted white, it reached a palatial climax in a facing of smooth white stone under a mansard roof, and the polished black walnut front doors opened upon a stone veranda. From the veranda a broad stone path led through the lawn and passed a stone fountain on its way to the elaborate cast-iron front gate, which was a congenial neighbour to the Oliphants' cast-iron gate to the south. The stone fountain culminated in a bronze swan, usually well supplied with ejectory water in the summertime but somewhat bleak of aspect in winter, when the swan's open beak, perpetually vacant, suggested to an observer the painful strain of unending effort absolutely wasted. It was a relief, after a snowstorm, to see the too-conscientious cavity partially choked.

A little snow remained there, like a cupful of salt that the dutiful bird had firmly refused to swallow, and snow glistened also along its dark green back, one February afternoon, when a lady on her way from the house to the gate paused by the fountain and regarded the swan with apparent thoughtfulness. She was twenty-three or perhaps twenty-four, tall and robust, a large young woman, handsome, and in a state of exuberant good health—her hearty complexion and the brightness of her clear hazel eyes were proof enough of that—and though a powdery new snow, just fallen, lay upon the ground and the air was frosty, she wore her fur coat thrown as far open as possible. And that her thoughtfulness about the bronze swan was only an appearance of thoughtfulness, and not actual, was denoted by the fact that her halt

at the fountain coincided with a sound from a short distance to the south of her. This sound was the opening and closing of a heavy door;—it was in fact the Oliphants' front door, one of the ponderous double doors of black walnut, like other front doors of the stately row. The lady looked at the swan only until the young man who had just closed that door behind him emerged from the deep vestibule and came down the steps.

He was a stalwart, dark-haired, blue-eyed young man, comely in feature and of an honest, friendly expression; and although the robust young lady was as familiar with his appearance as one could be who had lived all her life next door, yet when her gaze swept from the swan to him, she looked a little startled, also a little amused. What thus surprised and amused her was the unusual magnificence of his attire. Upon occasion she had seen a high hat upon him and likewise a full-skirted long coat and a puffed scarf, but never spats until now; and never before had she seen him carry a cane. This was of shining ebony, with a gold top, and swung from a hand in a dove-coloured glove. Dove was the exquisite tint, too, of his spats.

"Dan Oliphant!" she cried. "Why, my goodness!"

At the sound of her voice his eye brightened;—he turned at once, left the cement path that led to his own gate and came across the frozen lawn to the partition fence not far from her. Still exclaiming, she went there to meet him.

"My goodness gracious, Dan!" she cried, and shook hands with him between two rods of the iron fence.

"What's the matter, Martha?" he inquired. "I'm mighty glad to see you. I just got home from New York yesterday."

"I know you did," she said. "I mean I see you did. I should *say* so!"

"What's all the excitement?"

She proved unable to reply otherwise than by continuing her exclamations. "Why, *Dan!*" she cried. "Dan *Oliphant!*"

At that he seemed to feel there would be no readier way to solve the puzzle of her behaviour than to adopt her style

himself. "*Martha!*" he exclaimed then, in amiable mockery of her. "Martha *Shelby!* Well, good gracious *me!*"

"It's the royal robes," she explained. "I'm overcome. Your mother and father have been worrying about your staying so long in New York, but certainly they understand now what detained you."

"What do you think it was, Martha?" he asked, his colour heightening a little.

"Why, you were learning to wear spats, of course, and how to carry a gold-headed cane. Is the President passing through town this afternoon?"

"No. Why?"

"I thought you might be one of a committee to meet him at the station and give him the keys of the city," said Miss Shelby. "Or are you going to make a speech somewhere?"

"No. I'm going to call on my grandmother."

"I hope dear old Mrs. Savage will be up to it. Would you like to have me walk with you as far as her gate? I'm going that way."

"You bet I'd like it!" Dan said heartily, and without exaggeration; for since this friendly next-door neighbour and he were children there had never been a time when he was not glad to see her or to be with her, walking or otherwise. She had always teased him mildly, now and then, but he bore it equably, not by any means displeased. Nor was he anything but pleased to-day, as they walked down the broad and quiet avenue together, rather slowly, and she resumed her mockery of his metropolitan splendours.

"I suppose your mother had to give up getting you to wear an ulster this afternoon," she said. "It might have hidden that wonderful frock coat."

"You know as well as I do I never wear an overcoat unless it's a lot colder than this," he returned; and he added: "You're a funny girl, Martha Shelby."

"Why?"

"Well, don't you consider you're an old friend of mine? Anyway, I do, and here I haven't seen you since way back

last fall, and you haven't said you're glad I'm back, or anything! The truth is, I was kind of lookin' forward to your sayin' something like that."

He spoke lightly, yet there was a hint of genuine grievance in his voice, and she was obviously pleased with it, for she gave him a quick side glance so fond it seemed almost a confession. But she laughed, perhaps to cover the confession, and said cheerfully: "There's one thing neither college nor New York has changed about you, Dan. You'll never learn to sound the final *G* in a participle; you'll always say 'lookin'' and 'sayin'' and 'goin'' and 'comin'.' Doesn't it worry Harlan?"

"Changin' the subject, aren't you?" he inquired. "Why didn't you tell me you're glad I'm back home again?"

"I am glad," she said obediently. "Are you glad, yourself?"

"To see you? You know it."

"No, I meant: Are you glad to be nome?"

He looked thoughtful. "Well, I like New York; there isn't any place else where you can see as much or do as much when you want to; it's always a mighty fine show. And, besides, I like some people that live there." He hesitated, continuing: "I—well, I do like some of the people in New York, but after all I'm glad to get home; I'm mighty glad." Then he added, as a second thought: "In a way, that is."

"In what way particularly, Dan?"

"Well, I do like some New York people," he insisted, a little consciously;—"and I'm sorry to be away from them, but it's pretty nice to get back here where you know 'most everybody you're liable to meet. When you see a dog, for instance, you know who he belongs to and probably even his name—anyhow you probably do, if he belongs in your own part of town—and most likely the dog'll know you, too, and stop and take some interest in you. Of course, I mean here you know everybody that *is* anybody;—naturally no one knows every soul in a town this big—and growin' bigger every day."

"Hurrah for you!" she cried, laughing at him again. "Why, you already talk like a member of the Chamber of Commerce, Dan."

"How's that?"

"Oh, you know the speeches they make: 'A city of prosperity, a city of homes, a city that produces more wooden butter-dishes than all the rest of the country combined! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the finest city with the biggest future in the whole extent of these United States!"

Dan laughed, but there came into his eyes a glint of enthusiasm that was wholly serious. "Well, I believe they're not so far wrong, at that. In some ways I think myself it *is* about the finest city in the country. It kind of came over me when I got off the train yesterday and drove up home through these broad old streets with the big trees and big houses. It's when you've been away a good while that you find out how you appreciate it when you get back. Harlan's just the other way; he says when he's been away and gets back, the place looks squalid to him. 'Squalid' was what he said. He makes me tired!"

"Does he?"

"Yes; when he talks like that, he does," Dan answered. "Why, the people you see on the streets here, they've all got time enough and interest enough in each other to stop and shake hands and ask about each other's families, and they're mighty nice, intelligent-looking people, too. In New York everybody hurries by; they don't know each other anyway, of course; and if you get off Broadway and Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue, and one or two other streets, you're liable to see about as many foreigners as you will Americans; but here they're pretty near all Americans. It's kind of a satisfaction to see the good, old-fashioned faces people have in this city."

"I like to hear you praising old-fashioned things," Martha Shelby said slyly. "You must have something dreadfully important to say to your grandmother, Dan."

"Why?"

"Well, don't people put on their robes of state for tremendous occasions? Or did you just get so in the habit of it in New York that you can't give it up?"

"Maybe that's it," he laughed. "But I expect it'll wear off pretty soon if I stay here; and anyhow I am glad to get back. The fact is I'm a lot gladder than I expected to be. The minute I got off the train I had a kind of feeling—a pretty strong feeling—that this is where I honestly belong. It was home, and the people and the streets and the yards and trees and even the air—they all felt homelike to me. And when I went into our good old house—why, I felt as if I hadn't been in a house, not a real *house*, all the time I was away. But most of all, it's the people."

"Your father and mother?"

"Yes," he said;—"but I mean everybody else, too. I mean you can seem to breathe easier with 'em and let out your voice to a natural tone without gettin' scared you're goin' to break a vase or something. For instance, I mean the way I feel with you, Martha. You see, with some New York people—I don't mean anything against 'em of course; but sometimes, when a person's with 'em, he almost feels as if he ought to be artificial or unnatural or something; but nobody could ever feel anything like that with you, Martha."

"No?" she said, and looked at him with a gravity in which there was a slight apprehension. "Perhaps you might like a little artificiality, though, just for a change. A moment ago you said you thought your New York habits would wear off, and you'd get more natural, if you stay here. What did you mean?"

"Me not natural?" he asked, surprised. "Why, don't I seem natural?"

"Yes, of course. You wouldn't know how not to be. You meant about your clothes. You said you'd probably get over wearing so much finery as a daily habit, if you stay here. Aren't you going to stay here, Dan?"

Her sidelong glance at him took note of a change in his expression, a perplexity that was faintly troubled, whereupon

the hint of apprehension in her own look deepened. "Don't tell me you're not!" she exclaimed suddenly, and as he failed to respond at once, she repeated this with emphasis so increased that it seemed a little outcry: "Don't tell me you're *not!*"

"I certainly hope to stay here," he said seriously. "I didn't realize how much I hoped to until I got back. I certainly would hate to leave this good old place where I grew up."

"But why should you leave it? Your mother told me the other day you expected to go into business here as soon as you get your grandfather's estate settled."

"Yes, I know," he returned, and she observed that his seriousness and his perplexity both increased. "It's always been my idea to do that," he went on, "and I still hope to carry it out. At any rate I'm goin' to try to."

"Then why don't you? What on earth could prevent you?"

Upon this, he seemed to take a sudden resolution. "Martha," he said, "I've got a notion to tell you about something; —it's something beautiful that's happened to me. I haven't told anybody yet. I wanted to tell my father and mother last night; but Harlan kept sittin' around where they were, until they went to bed; and somehow I didn't like to talk about it before him—anyway not at first. And to-day I haven't had a chance to tell 'em; father's been down at his office and mother had two charity board meetings. So you'll be the first person to know it."

"Will I?" Martha said in a low voice.

But he did not notice its altered quality; he was too much preoccupied with what he was saying; and he still looked forward into the perplexing distance. His companion's gaze, on the contrary, was turned steadily upon him; and the sunniness that had been in her eyes had vanished, the colour of her cheeks was not so brave in the cold air. "I'm a little afraid to hear it, Dan," she said. "I'm afraid you're going to say you got engaged to someone in New York. You are?"

"Yes," he answered gravely. "That's what I'm just on the way to tell my grandmother."

"I guessed it," Martha said quietly; and was silent for a moment;—then she laughed. "I might have guessed it from your clothes, Dan. You got all dressed up like this just to talk about her! And to your grandmother!"

A little hurt by her laughter, he turned his head to look at her and saw that there were sudden bright lines along her eyelids. "Why, Martha!" he cried. "Why, what——"

"Isn't it natural?" she asked, smiling at him to contradict the testimony offered by her tears. "I've always had you for a next-door neighbour; you've always been my best friend among the boys I grew up with;—I'm afraid I'll lose you if you get married. Everybody likes you, Dan; I think everybody'll feel the same way. We'll all be afraid we'll lose you."

"Why, Martha!" he exclaimed again, but he had difficulty in misrepresenting a catch in his throat as a cough. "I didn't —I didn't expect you'd think of it like this. I do hope it doesn't mean that I'll have to live in New York. I still hope to get her to come here. I—I'd certainly hate to lose you more than you would to lose me. I've always thought of you as my best friend, too, and I couldn't imagine anything making that different. I'd hoped—I do hope——"

"What, Dan?"

"I hope you—I hope you'll like her, if we come home to live. I hope you'll be *her* friend, too."

"Indeed I will!" she promised so earnestly that her utterance was but a husky whisper. "I'm glad I'm the first you told, Dan. Thank you."

"No, no," he said awkwardly. "It just happened that way."

"Well, at least I'm glad it did," she returned, and brushing her eyes lightly with the back of a shapely hand, showed him a cheerful countenance. "See! you had just time to tell me."

CHAPTER IV

SHE nodded to where before them a long wooden picket fence outlined the street boundary of Mrs. Savage's lawn. Here was an older quarter than that upper reach of National Avenue whence the two young people had come; the houses here and southward were most of them substantial and ample, but not of the imposing spaciousness prevailing farther up the avenue. Three or four of them had felt the seventies so deeply as to adopt the mansard roof in company with one or two parasite slate turrets; but in the main the houses were without pretentiousness; and among them it was curious and pleasant to see lingering two or three white, low-gabled cottages of a single story.

In the summertime old-fashioned flowers grew in the yards of these, and there might be morning-glories climbing over the front doors; for the cottages were relics of the time when the city was a village and this region was the outlying fringe, beyond the end of the wooden sidewalks. Now, however, it was almost upon the edge of commerce;—there was smoke in the air, and through the haze were seen rising, a few blocks to the south, the blue silhouettes of dozens of office buildings, the court-house tower, and the giant oblong of the first skyscraper, the First National Bank, eleven stories high. Moreover, one of the white cottages had for next-door neighbour the first apartment house to be built in the city;—it was just finished, rose seven stories above its little neighbour, and was significantly narrow. The ground here had already become costly.

Mrs. Savage's gray picket fence joined the white picket fence of the overshadowed white cottage and her house was a good sample of four-square severity, built of brick and painted gray, with two noble old walnut trees in front, one

on each side of the brick walk that led from the gate to the small veranda. Here she had lived during little less than half a century;—that is to say, ever since her house had been called "the finest residence in the city," when her husband built it in the decade before the Civil War. Here, too, she "preferred to die," as she said brusquely when her daughter wished her to come and live at the Oliphants', after Mr. Savage's death. She was still "fully able to keep house" for herself, she added, and expected to do so until Smith and Lieven came for her; Smith and Lieven being the undertakers who had conducted all the funerals in her family.

But at ninety-two it is impossible to withhold all concessions; even a lady whose pioneer father whipped her when she was fifteen must bend a little; and although Mrs. Savage still declined to sit in a comfortable chair, she took a daily nap in the afternoon. She had just risen and descended to her parlour, and settled herself by the large front window, when the two young people, coming along the sidewalk, reached the north end of her picket fence.

She did not recognize them at first; for, although her eyes "held out," as she said, they held out not quite well enough for her to see faces except as ivory or pinkish blurs, unless they were close to her. However, the two figures interested her; and because of their slow approach and something intimate in the way they seemed to be communing, she guessed that they might be lovers. To her surprise, they halted at her gate, but, instead of coming in, continued their conversation there for several moments. Then, though they appeared loath to separate, each took both of the other's hands for a moment, in an impulsive gesture distinctly expressive of emotion, and the woman's figure went down the street, walking hurriedly, while the man's came in at the gate and approached the front door. Mrs. Savage recognized her grandson, but no slightest change in her expression or attitude marked the moment of recognition.

Upon the sound of the bell, the old coloured man who had been her servant for thirty years came softly through the

hall, but instead of opening the door to the visitor he presented himself before his mistress in the parlour. He was a thin old man of the darkest brown, neat and erect, with a patient expression, a beautifully considerate manner, and a tremulous tenor voice. In addition, his given name was both romantic and religious: Nimbus.

"You like to receive callers, Miz Savage?" he inquired. "Doorbell ring."

"I heard it," the old lady informed him somewhat crisply. "Have you any reason to suppose I can't hear my own doorbell?"

"No'm."

"Then why did you see fit to mention that it rang?"

"I don' know, 'm. You hear good as what I do, Miz Savage," he returned apologetically. "I dess happen say she ring. Mean nothin' 't all. You like me bring 'em in or say ain't home, please?"

"It's my grandson, Dan."

"Yes'm," said Nimbus, turning to the door; "I go git him."

He went out into the broad hall and opened the door to the thoughtful young man waiting there, who shook hands with him and greeted him warmly; whereupon Nimbus glowed visibly, expressing great pleasure and cordiality. "My goo'nuss me!" he said. "Hope I be close on hand when you git ready shed them clo'es, Mist' Dan. You' grammaw cert'n'y be overjoice' to see you ag'in. She settin' in polluh waitin' fer you, if you kinely leave me rest you' silk hat an' gole-head cane. *My*, look at all the gole on nat cane!"

Receiving this emblem of state with murmurous reverence, he solicitously bore it to the marble-topped table as the young man entered the room where his grandmother awaited him. She sat by the broad window, which had been the first plate-glass window in the town, and in her cap with lace lappets and her full, dark gown, she was not unsuggestive, in spite of her great age, of Whistler's portrait of his mother.

Certainly, until her grandson took her hand and sat down beside her, she was as motionless as a portrait.

"Grandma," he said remorsefully, "I'm afraid you feel mighty hurt with me. I know it looked pretty selfish of me not to come home sooner, so we could go ahead and get grandpa's estate settled up. I expect you think I haven't been very thoughtful of you, and you certainly have got a right to feel kind of cross with me, but the truth is——"

"No," she interrupted quietly. "Your father was too busy to attend to the estate himself, and I didn't want Harlan because I know he'd spend all his time criticizing; and besides he didn't offer to do it in the first place, and you did. But your father hired a lawyer for me, and the work's about finished."

"I know what you think of me——" he began but again she interrupted.

"No; you behaved naturally in staying away. Young people always say they like to help old people, but it isn't natural. Mankind are all really just Indians, naturally. In some of the lower Indian tribes they kill off everybody that gets old and useless, and that's really the instinct of the young in what we call civilization. We old people understand how you young people really think of us."

"Oh, my!" the young man groaned. "I was afraid you were a little hurt with me, but I didn't dream you'd feel *this* way about it."

"No," she said;—"you were having too good a time to dream how anybody'd feel about anything. Your father and mother worried some about you, and once or twice your father talked of going East to see what you were up to. They were afraid you were running wild, but I told 'em they needn't fret about that."

"Did you, grandma?"

"Yes. Your running wild would never amount to much; you come of too steady a stock on both sides not to get over it and settle down. No; what I was afraid of is just what I expect has happened."

"What's that?" Dan asked indulgently. "What do you think's happened, grandma? Think I got too extravagant and threw away a lot of money?"

"No," she replied; and to his uncomfortable amazement continued grimly: "I expect you've fallen in love with some no-account New York girl and want to marry her."

"Grandma!"

"I do!" the old lady asserted. "Isn't that what's been the matter with you?"

She spoke challengingly, with an angry note in the challenge, and Dan's colour, ruddy after his walk, grew ruddier;—the phrase "no-account New York girl" hurt and offended him, even though his grandmother knew nothing whatever of Lena McMillan. "You're very much mistaken," he said gravely.

"I hope so," Mrs. Savage returned. "Who was that you were talking to out at my front gate?"

"Martha Shelby."

"Martha? That's all right," she said, and added abruptly: "If you've got to marry somebody you ought to marry her."

"What?"

"If you've got to marry somebody," this uncomfortable old lady repeated, "why don't you marry Martha?"

"Why, that's just preposterous!" Dan protested. "The last person in the world Martha'd ever think of marrying would be me, and the last person I'd ever think of marrying would be Martha."

"Why?"

"Why?" he repeated incredulously. "Why, because we aren't in love with each other and never *could* be! Never in the world!"

"It isn't necessary," Mrs. Savage informed him. "You'd get along better if you weren't. Martha comes of good stock, and she's like her stock."

"There are other 'good stocks' in the country," he thought proper to remind her gently. "There are a few people in New York of fairly good 'stock,' you know, grandma."

"Maybe a few," she said;—"but not our kind. The surest way to make misery is to mix stocks. You come of the best stock in the country, and you'll be mighty sick some day if you go mixing it with a bad one."

"But good gracious!" he cried, "who's talking of my mixing it with a——"

"Never mind," she interrupted crossly. "I know what those New York girls are like."

"But, grandma——"

"I do," she insisted. "They don't know anything in the world except French and soirées, and it's no wonder when you look at their stocks!"

"Grandma——"

"Listen to me," she bade him sharply. "The best stocks in England were the yeoman stocks; you ought to know that much, yourself, after all these years you've spent at school and college. The strongest in mind and body out of the English yeoman stocks came to America; they fought the Indians and the French and the British and got themselves a country of their own. Then, after that, the strongest in mind and body out of those stocks came out here and opened this new country and built it up. All they've got left in the East now are the remnants that didn't have gumption and get-up enough to strike out for the new land. The only thing that keeps the East going is the people that emigrate back there from here in the second and third generations. Don't you mix your stock with any remnants! D'you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," he meekly replied, dismayed not only by the extremity of the discouraging old lady's view upon "stocks" and "New York girls," but also by her shrewdness in divining the cause of his long absence. Nevertheless, he ventured to protest again, though feebly. "I think if you could see New York nowadays, grandma, you wouldn't think it's a city built by 'remnants,' exactly."

"I don't have to see it," she retorted. "I know history; and besides, I was there with your grandfather in eighteen fifty-nine. We stayed two weeks at the Astor House, and

your grandfather was mighty glad to get back here to home cooking. Even then all the smart men in New York came from somewhere else. Outside of them and the politicians, the only New York people you ever hear anything about are the ones that have had just barely gumption enough to be stingy."

"What? Why, grandma——"

"They never made anything; they've just barely got the gumption to hold on to what's been left to 'em," she insisted. "As soon as anybody gets money, everybody else sets in to try to get it away from him. They try to get him to give it away; they try to trade him out of it, or to swindle him out of it, or to steal it from him. Everybody wants money and the only way to get it is to get it from somebody else; but for all that, the lowest form of owning money is just inheriting it and sitting down on it; and that's just about all they know how to do, these New York folks you seem to think so much of!"

"But my goodness, grandma!" the troubled young man exclaimed. "I haven't said——"

She cut him off again, for she was far from the conclusion of her discourse; and he got the impression—a correct one—that during his protracted absence she had been bottling within herself the considerable effervescence she now released upon him. She interrupted him with great spirit. "You wait till I'm through, and then you can have your say! I know these New York girls better than you do. You aren't capable of knowing anything about women anyway, at your age. You're the kind of young man that idealizes anything that'll give you half a chance to idealize it. You are! I've watched you. What do girls mean to a young man like you? If he doesn't think they're good-looking, they don't mean anything at all to him; it's just the same as if they weren't living. But if he thinks some silly little thing is pretty, and she takes special notice of him, that's enough;—he's liable to start right in and act like a crazy man over her! She may be the biggest fool, and the meanest one, too, on earth; he thinks she's got all the goodness and all the wisdom in the universe!

You can't help getting into that state about her; but after you've been married awhile the gloss'll wear off, and you'll begin to notice what you've tied yourself up to—to live with till you're dead!"

"But I haven't told you——"

Again she disregarded him. "*I* know these New York nighty-tighties!" she said. "Your grandfather and I went to Saratoga the year after the war, and we spent a month there. We saw a plenty of 'em! They aren't fit to do anything but flirt and talk French and go to soirées. They're the most ignorant people I ever met in my life. They're so ignorant if you asked their opinion of Lalla Rookh they wouldn't know what you were talking about; but they think you're funny if you don't know that some fancy milliner of theirs keeps store on Broadway and not on the Bowery. That's about the measure of 'em."

"Well, not nowadays, exactly," her grandson said indulgently. "Some of the ones you saw at Saratoga thirty or forty years ago may have been like that, grandma, but nowadays——"

"Nowadays," she said, taking the word up sharply, 'they're just the same. They fooled the young men then just the same as they fool 'em now. They make a young man like you think they know everything, because they're pretty and talk that affected way Harlan does."

"But with them it isn't affected, grandma. It's natural with them. They've *always*——"

But the obdurate old lady contradicted him instantly. 'It's not! It isn't natural for any human being to talk like that! You mustn't bring one of those girls out here to live, Dan."

"Grandma——" he began in an uneasy voice; "Grandma, I came here to tell you——"

"Yes, I was afraid of it," she said. "I was afraid of it."

"Afraid of what?"

A plaintive frown appeared upon her forehead before she answered. She sighed deeply, as if the increased rapidity

of her breathing had made her insecure of continuing to breathe at all; and her frail hands, folded in her lap, moved nervously. "Don't do it, Dan," she said. "You ought to wait a few years before you marry, anyway. You're so young, and one of those New York girls wouldn't understand things here; she wouldn't know enough not to feel superior. You'd just make misery for yourself."

But at this he laughed confidently. "You don't know the one I'm thinkin' of," he said. "You've guessed something of what I came to tell you, grandma, but you've certainly missed fire about her! I'll show you." And from his breast pocket he took an exquisite flat case of blue leather and silver; opened it, and handed it to her. "There's her photograph. I'd like to see if you think *she's* the kind you've been talkin' about!"

Mrs. Savage put on the eye-glasses she wore fastened to a thin chain around her neck, and examined the photograph of Lena McMillan. She looked at it steadily for a long minute, then handed it back to her grandson, removed her glasses, and, without a word, again folding her hands in her lap, looked out of the window.

Under these discomfiting circumstances Dan said, as hopefully as he could, "You've changed your mind now, haven't you, grandma?"

"On account of that picture?" she asked, without altering her attitude.

"Yes. Don't you think she's—don't you think she's——"

"Don't I think she's what?" Mrs. Savage inquired in a dead voice.

"Don't you think she's perfect?"

"Perfect?" Expressionlessly, she turned and looked at him. "What are your plans, Dan?"

"You mean, when do we expect to——"

"No. What business are you going into?"

"Well——" He paused doubtfully; "I still hope—I mean if I don't have to go to New York to live——"

"So?" she interrupted with seeming placidity. "She de-

clines to come here to live, does she? She hates it here, does she, already?"

"I don't think she would," he said quickly. "Not if she once got used to it. You see she doesn't know anything about it; she's never been west of Rochester, and she only *thinks* she wouldn't like it. I've been doin' my best to persuade her."

"But you couldn't?"

"Oh, I haven't given up," he said. "I think when the time comes——"

"But if she won't, 'when the time comes,'" Mrs. Savage suggested;—"then instead of living here, where you've grown up and want to live, you'll go and spend your life in New York. Is that it?"

"Well, I——"

"So you'd do it," she said, "just to please the face in that photograph!"

"You don't understand, grandma," he returned, and he hurriedly passed a handkerchief across his distressed forehead. "You see, it isn't only Lena herself don't think much of our part of the country. You see, her family——"

"Ah!" the grim lady interrupted. "She's got a family, has she? Indeed?"

"Great goodness!" he groaned, "I mean her father and mother and her sister and her aunts and her married sister, and everybody. They're important people, you see."

"Are they? What do they do that's important?"

"It isn't so much what they do exactly," he explained, "it's what they *are*. You see, they're descended from General McMillan and——"

"General McMillan? Never heard of him. What was he a general of? New York militia? Knights of Pythias, maybe?"

"I'm not exactly certain," Dan admitted, again applying his handkerchief to his forehead. "I think he had something to do with history before the Revolution. I don't know just what, but anyhow they all feel it was pretty important; and you see to them, why I'm just nobody at all, and of course

they must feel I'm pretty crude. It's true, too, because I *am* crude compared to Lena; and for a good while her family were more or less against any such engagement. Of course the way they think about *my* family is even worse than the way you think about *them*, grandma; and naturally she says herself they're positive it'd be a terrible sacrifice for her to come and live out here. I mean that's the way they look at it."

"Of course they do," said Mrs. Savage. "That's the way those New York people at Saratoga thought about this part of the country. They're just the same nowadays, I tell you; they haven't got the kind of brains that can learn anything. Does this photograph girl herself talk about what a 'sacrifice' it would be for her to live here?"

"Lena McMillan is a noble girl," Dan informed her earnestly. "She feels a lot of respect for her family's wishes, and besides she doesn't like the idea of leavin' New York herself but I don't remember her usin' the word 'sacrifice' exactly. She doesn't put it that way."

"What about *you?* Do you put it that way? Do you think it would be a sacrifice for her to come and live here?"

"I?" Dan was obviously astonished to be asked such a question. "Why, my goodness!" he exclaimed, "I wouldn't be beggin' her to try it if I thought so, would I? If I can just get her to try it I know she'll like it. How could anybody help likin' it?"

"You're pretty liable to find out how this photograph girl will help it!" his grandmother prophesied, and promptly checked him as he began to protest against her repeated definition of Lena as "this photograph girl." She retorted "Tut, tut!" as a snub to his protest, then inquired: "What business do you expect to go into, if you live in New York?"

"I don't know," he said gloomily. "I don't see what I could do there."

"What will you do if you stay here?"

At that he brightened instantly. "Why, I think I've got hold of a big idea, grandma. I began to think about it last

September, and it's been in my mind all the time I was away; —I've been goin' over it and workin' it out. It's something would make a mighty good profit for me and at the same time I think it'd be a big thing for this city."

"Indeed?" she said. "Yes, you're at the age when everything looks like a 'big thing.' Your grandfather used to talk like that when we were first married."

"Well, he was one of this city's most successful men, wasn't he? He did do big things, didn't he?"

"That was in the early days when he kept us poor," she said, with a short laugh of extreme dryness. "He had ideas about going into things to make this a greater city, and get 'a mighty good profit' for himself, the way you talk now—but what finally made his money was keeping *out* of big schemes. It was what I kept him from doing that made us well off, not what he did. We saved and went into safe things like the First National Bank stock. When it comes to you and Harlan, after I'm gone, you mustn't ever sell that bank stock, Dan. What is this 'big idea' you spoke of?"

"It's the old Ornaby farm, grandma."

"Oh, I see," she assented with ready satire. "Yes; this photograph girl will make a fine farmer's wife!"

"No, she won't," he returned good-naturedly. "That farm lies right where this city's bound to grow to. I want to take the money grandpa left me and buy it. Then I'll lay it out in lots and make an Addition of it."

"So?" she said. "That's the 'big idea,' is it?"

"That's it, grandma."

She shook her head in pitying skepticism. "You can't carry it out. In the first place, the town'll never grow that far out——"

"Yes, it will," he interrupted eagerly. "Why, in three years at the longest——"

"No," she said; "it won't. Not in three years and not in thirty. Anyhow, your grandfather only left you twenty-five thousand dollars. You'd better keep it and not throw it away, Dan."

"I can get the Ornaby farm for seventeen thousand," he informed her. "That'll leave eight thousand to clear off the lots and put asphalt streets through and——"

"Put asphalt streets through!" she echoed. "How many miles of asphalt streets do you expect to build with eight thousand dollars after you've cleared the lots and advertised enough to boom an Addition?"

"I've been hopin' I'd get help on that," he said, his colour heightening a little. "I thought maybe I could get Harlan to come in with the twenty-five thousand grandpa left him. If he does——"

"He won't. Harlan isn't the kind to risk anything. He won't."

"Well, then," Dan said, "I'll go ahead and get other people. I'm goin' to do it, grandma, if I have to take an ax and a shovel and a wheelbarrow out there and do it all by myself. I've been thinkin' it over a long time, and I know it's a big thing." He laughed a little at his own enthusiasm, but again declared, with earnest determination: "Yes, ma'am! I'm goin' to build 'Ornaby Addition.'"

But his grandmother's compassionate skepticism was not lessened. On the contrary, she asked him quietly: "You're going to build 'Ornaby Addition' at the same time you expect to be living in New York with this photograph girl for a wife? How do you think you'll manage it, Dan?"

"Oh, she'll come here," he said. "I know she will, when I make her see what a big chance this idea of mine gives us. I think I can get her to try it, anyhow; and if she'll just do that it'll come out all right."

"You think she'll be a great help to you, do you, while you're working with a wheelbarrow out on Ornaby's farm?"

"Do I?" he exclaimed, and added radiantly: "A help? Why, grandma, she—she'll be a great deal more than a help; she'll be an inspiration! That's exactly what she'll be, grandma."

Old Mrs. Savage looked at him fixedly, sighed, and spoke as in a reverie. "Ah, me! How many, many young men I've

seen believing such things in my long time here! How many, many I've seen that were going to do big things, and how many that thought some no-account girl was going to be their inspiration!"

"Grandma!" he cried indignantly, and rose from his chair. "You haven't any right to speak of her like that."

"No right?" she said quietly. "No, I s'pose not. I wonder how many hundred times in my life I've been told I hadn't any right to speak the truth. It must be so."

"But it *isn't* the truth," Dan protested, and in a plaintive agitation he moved toward the door. "I showed you a photograph of the sweetest, noblest, most beautiful woman that's ever come into my life, and you speak of her as—as—well, as you just did speak of her, grandma! I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world, but I—well, you aren't fair. I don't want to say any more than that, so I expect I better go."

"Wait!" she said sharply; and he halted in the doorway. "You wait a minute, young man. I'm going to say my last say to you, and you better listen!"

"Yes, of course I will, if you want me to, grandma," he assented, as he came back into the room and stood before her. "Only I hope you won't say anything against her; and I don't think you ought to call it your 'last say' to me. I'm sure you won't stop speakin' to me."

"Won't I?" she asked: and he was aware of a strange pathos in her glance, and that her head constantly shook a little. "Won't I? I'm going to stop speaking to everybody, Dan, before long."

"But you look so well, grandma; you oughtn't to talk like that."

"Never mind. My talking is about over, but I'm going to tell you something you may remember when I can't talk any more at all. Your father and mother won't even try to have any influence with you; they haven't raised their children the way I did mine. Your father and mother have always been too easy-going with you to really help you by disciplining you when you wanted to do anything wrong,

and they'll both act the gentle fool with you now, just as they always have about everything. They won't stop you from going ahead with this photograph girl."

"No," Dan said gently;—"and nothing could stop me, grandma. I told you she's the finest, most beautiful——"

"Be quiet!" the old lady cried. "How much of that same sort of twaddle do you suppose a body's heard in a life of ninety-two years? How many times do you suppose I've had to listen to just such stuff? Good heavens!"

"But, grandma——"

"You listen to *me!*" she said with sudden ferocity. "You don't know anything about the girl, and you don't know anything about yourself. At your age you don't know anything about anything. You don't even know you don't know. And another thing you don't know is, how much you've told me about this girl and her family without knowing it."

"Grandma, I told you they're fine people and——"

"Fine people!" she said bitterly. "Oh, yes! And how have they treated you?"

"Why, aren't they givin' me their—their dearest treasure? Doesn't that show how they——"

"Yes, doesn't it?" she interrupted. "It shows how much of a treasure *they* think she is!"

"Grandma——"

"You listen! You're a splendid young man, Dan Oliphant. You're good-looking; you're honourable as the daylight; you're kindhearted, and you'd be just as polite to a nigger or a dog as you would to the President; and anybody can tell all that about you by just looking at you once. But this good-for-nothing girl and her good-for-nothing family have made you feel you weren't anybody at all, and ought to feel flattered to scrub their doormat! Don't tell me! They have! And because you let yourself get as soft as a ninny over a silly little pretty face, you truckle to 'em."

"Grandma!" He laughed despairingly. "I haven't been truckling to anybody."

"You have, and she'll keep you at it all your life!" the old

lady said angrily. "*I* know what that face means. I've seen a thousand just like it! She'll use you and make you truckle to *be* used! And if you give in to her and live in her town, she'll despise you. If you make her come and live in your town, she'll hate you. But she'll always keep you truckling. Your only chance is to get rid of her."

"Grandma," he said desperately;—"I'm sorry, but I can't hear you talk this way about the sweetest, the most perfect, the loveliest——"

"Get rid of her!" she cried. And as the distressed young man went out into the hall she leaned forward in her chair, shaking at him a piteously bent and emaciated forefinger. "You get rid of her, if you don't want to die in the gutter! Get rid of her!"

CHAPTER V

DAN walked home from his grandmother's with the wind blowing a fine snow against his chest, within which something seemed to be displaced and painful. Higher up, under the cold sleek band of his tall hat, there was a stricken puzzlement; and no doubt he was in hard case. For a young lover rebuffed upon speaking of his sweetheart is like a fine artist who has made some fragile, exquisite thing and offers it confidently in tender pride, only to see it buffeted and misprized. To Dan it seemed as though Lena herself had been injuriously mishandled, whereas the injury fell really upon something much more delicate; the lovely image he had made for himself and thought was Lena—an angelic substance most different from the substance of that "little brunette" herself.

He told himself that his grandmother had increased in unreasonableness with increasing age, but in spite of all efforts to reassure himself, and notwithstanding her prediction that he would receive a foolish support from his parents in the matter of his engagement, it was decidedly without jauntiness that he made his announcement to them after dinner that evening.

He found them in the library, a shadowy big room where the fire of soft coal twinkled again upon polished dark woodwork, upon the clear glass doors of the bookcases, and touched with rose the eye-glasses and the shining oval façade of Harlan's shirt as he sat reading Suetonius under a tall lamp in the bay window. Harlan, unlike his father and his brother, always "dressed" for dinner.

He was the thinner and perhaps an inch shorter of the two brothers; but in spite of their actual likeness of contour, people who knew them most intimately sometimes main-

tained that there was not even an outward resemblance, so sharp was the contrast in manner and expression. It was Martha Shelby who said that if Harlan had been a year shipwrecked and naked on a savage isle he would still look fastidious and wear "that same old 'How-vulgar-everything-seems-to-be!' expression." Tramps approaching Harlan on the street to beg a dime from him usually decided at the last moment to pass on in philosophic silence.

He was no more like the two handsome, gray-haired people who sat by the library fire, that evening, than he was like his brother. Mr. Oliphant, genial and absent-minded, was the very man of whom any beggar would make sure at first sight; and he was without an important accumulation of fortune now, in fact, because venturous friends of his had too often made sure of him to go on a note or to forestall a bankruptcy that eventually failed to be forestalled. His wife was not the guardian to save him from a disastrous generosity; she was the most ready woman in the world to be recklessly kind, and when kindness brought losses she kept as sunny a heart as her husband did.

Mrs. Savage was right: from this pair no discipline for the good of their son's future need have been expected, although her own effect upon him had been so severe that he began his announcement in the library with a defensive formality that denoted apprehension. His formality, moreover, was elaborate enough to be considered intricate, with the result that his surprised listeners were at first not quite certain of his meaning.

His father withdrew slippered feet from close intimacy with the brass fender enclosing the hearth, stared whimsically at his son, and inquired: "What is it all about, Dan?"

"Sir?"

"It doesn't quite penetrate," Mr. Oliphant informed him. "You seem to be making an address, but I'm not secure as to its drift. I gather that you believe something about there coming a time in a young man's life when his happiness depends upon an important step, and you'd hate to be de-

prived of something or other. You said something, too, about a union. It didn't seem to connect with labour questions, so I'm puzzled. Could you clarify my mind?"

Harlan, resting his book in his lap, laughed dryly and proffered a suggestion: "It sounds to me, sir, as if he might possibly mean a union with a damsel of marriageable age and propensities."

"Dan!" the mother cried. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes'm," he said meekly. "I wanted to tell you last night, but—well, anyway it's so. She's the most splendid, noblest, finest girl I ever met, and I know you'll think so, too. Here—well, here's her picture." And he handed the blue case to Mrs. Oliphant.

"Why, Dan!" she said, suddenly tearful, as she took the case and held it open before her.

Her husband, not speaking, got up quickly, came behind her and looked over her shoulder at the photograph of Lena. Then after a moment he looked at Dan, but for a time seemed to be uncertain about what he ought to say. "She's—ah—she's pretty enough, Dan," he said finally, in his kind voice. "She's certainly pretty enough for us to understand your getting this way about her."

"Yes, Dan," his mother agreed. "She—she's quite pretty. I'm sure she's pretty."

"She's beautiful!" Dan declared huskily. "She's beautiful, and she's more than that; she has a character that's perfect. She has an absolutely perfect character, mother."

"I hope so," Mrs. Oliphant said gently, bending her head above the blue case. "After all, you can't tell everything from a photograph." She looked up at her husband as if arguing with him. "You *can't* tell much from a photograph."

"No," he assented readily. "Of course you can't. In fact, you can tell very little; but you can see this is a pretty girl, anyhow. I expect you'd better tell us a little more about her, Dan."

Dan complied. That is to say, he did his best to make them comprehend Lena's perfection; and, touching lightly upon

her descent from that somewhat shadowy figure in heroic antiquity, General McMillan—Dan felt sensitive for the general since Mrs. Savage's suggestion about the Knights of Pythias—he kept as much as possible to the subject of Lena herself, and ended by declaring rather oratorically that she had just the qualities he had always admired in the noblest women.

"I do hope so, Dan dear," his mother said, her eyes still shining with tears in the firelight. "I do hope so!"

"Yes," Mr. Oliphant agreed, "I hope so, too, Dan; and anyhow, if you've cared enough about her to ask her to marry you, that's the main thing. You can be sure your mother and father will do their best to be fond of anybody you're fond of."

"But she *has* those qualities, father," Dan said, not quite sure, himself, why he seemed to be insisting upon this in a tone so plaintively argumentative. "Indeed she has! She has just exactly the qualities I've always admired in the noblest women I've ever known."

"In grandma, for instance?" Harlan inquired.

"What?"

"You said she had just the qualities you've observed in the noblest women. Well, grandma has noble qualities. I was wondering——"

"No," Dan said, swallowing. "Lena—well, she's different."

"If she has the qualities that will help you in building your future," Mrs. Oliphant said, "that will be enough for us."

"She has, mother. Those are just exactly the qualities she's got. Don't you think when—when——" He faltered, obviously in timidity, and glanced nervously at the observant Harlan.

"When what, dear?"

"Well, when—when a wife's an—an inspiration," he said, gulping the word out;—"well, isn't that just everything?"

"Of course, dear." Mrs. Oliphant said comfortingly. Then, when she had touched her eyes with her lace-edged

little handkerchief, she spoke more briskly. "This will be quite exciting news for your grandmother, Dan. Poor dear woman! She's been waiting so anxiously for you to come home; and she's grown so frail these last few months; she kept saying she was afraid she wouldn't last till you got here. She's devoted to Harlan, of course, but I think you've always been a little her favourite, Dan."

"A little?" Harlan repeated serenely. "She really doesn't like me at all."

"Oh, yes, she does," his mother protested. "She's devoted to you, too, but she——"

"No," Harlan interrupted quietly; "she's never liked me. I have no doubt when her will is read you'll find it out."

But upon this his father intervened cheerfully. "Let's don't talk about her will just yet," he said. "She's going to be with us a long time, we hope. Dan, you'd better go and tell her your news to-morrow."

"I did, sir. I went this afternoon."

"What did she say?"

Dan passed his hand across his forehead. "Well—she—well, I told her about it and—well, you know how she *is*, sir. She—isn't apt to get enthusiastic about hardly anything. She seemed to think—well, one thing she seemed to think was that I'm sort of young to be gettin' married."

"Well, maybe," said his father. "Maybe she's right."

"No, sir, I don't believe so. You see grandma is almost ninety-three. Why, to a person of that age almost anybody else looks pretty young. You see, it isn't so much I *am* young; it's only I look young to grandma."

But upon this argument, delivered in a tone most hopeful of convincing, Mr. Oliphant laughed outright. "So that's the way of it!" he exclaimed, and, returning to his seat by the fire, again extended his feet to the fender. "Well, whether you're really a little too young or only appear so, on account of your grandmother's advanced age, we have to face the fact that you've asked this young lady to marry you, and she's said she will. When that's happened, all the old folks can do

is to make the best of it. You know we'll do that, don't you, son?"

"Yes, sir," Dan said a little bleakly. "I knew you would." He took the blue case from his mother's lap, and kissed her as she looked pathetically up at him; then he moved toward the door. "I—I always knew I could count on you and mother, sir."

"Yes, Dan," Mrs. Oliphant murmured, "you know you can."

And her husband, from his chair by the fireside, echoed this with a heartiness that was somewhat husky: "Yes, indeed, Dan. If the young lady is necessary to your happiness——"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, we'll just try to say, 'God bless you both,' my boy."

"Yes, sir," Dan returned, with an inadequacy that he seemed to feel, himself, for he lingered near the doorway some moments more, coughed in a futile and unnecessary manner, then said feebly: "Well—well, thank you," and retired slowly to his own room.

When his steps were no longer heard ascending the broad stairway, the sound of a quick sob, too impulsive to be smothered, was heard in the silent library, and Mr. Oliphant turned to stare at his wife. "Well, what's the matter?" he said. "I told you, you can't tell anything from a photograph, didn't I?"

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and shook her head, offering no other response.

Thereupon he struck the poker into the fire, badgered a lump of coal, and said gruffly: "It's all nonsense! She may turn out to be the finest girl in the world. How can you tell anything from a photograph?"

"You can't much," the serene Harlan agreed. He spoke from his easy-chair in the bay window, whither he had returned from an unemotional excursion to the blue leather case when it was exhibited. "You can see, though, that Dan's young person is perfect, as he said, in several ways."

"Think so?"

"Yes; she's perfectly *à la mode;* she's perfectly pretty—and perfectly what we usually call shallow."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Don't you?" Harlan asked, with a slight amusement, and added reflectively: "Martha Shelby won't like this much, I dare say."

"No," Mrs. Oliphant said faintly. "Poor Martha!"

"Oh, look here!" her husband remonstrated. "What's the use of all this? You're acting as if we were facing a calamity. Dan's got a mighty good head on his shoulders; he wouldn't fall in love with a mere little goose. Besides, didn't I ask you: 'What can you tell from a photograph?'"

"Not everything, sir," Harlan interposed. "But you can usually get an idea of the type of person it's a photograph of."

"Yes, you can," Mrs. Oliphant said. "That's what frightens me. She doesn't seem the type that would want to take care of him when he's sick and be interested in his business and help him. She might even be the type that wouldn't like living here, after New York, and would get to complaining and want to take him away. Of course it *is* true we can't tell from that photograph, though."

"Can't you?" Harlan asked with a short laugh. "Then why are you so disturbed by it?"

"That's sense," his father said approvingly. "If you can't tell anything about her, what's the sense of worrying?"

"It doesn't appear that you got my point, sir," Harlan remarked. "You and mother are both disturbed because you *have* drawn certain conclusions."

"From that picture?"

"I think so, sir."

"You're talking nonsense," Mr. Oliphant returned testily. "Nobody can tell anything at all from a photograph. Not a thing!"

"No," Mrs. Oliphant agreed, wiping her eyes again. "I hope not. I mean I'm *sure* not."

"That's right," said her husband heartily. "That's the way to look at it."

"Yes; isn't it!" said the sardonic Harlan, as he resumed his reading; and for a time the library was given over to a reflective silence;—the ceiling, fifteen feet from the floor, was too solid a structure for the pacing that had begun overhead to be heard below.

Up and down his room Dan walked and walked. In the few contemporary novels that he had read the hero's acceptance by a beautiful girl implied general happiness on earth; all the difficulties of mankind seemed to disappear with the happy elimination of those of this favourite twain. Moreover, when friends of his had become engaged there was always joviality; there were congratulations and eager gaieties; there were friendly chaffings from the old stock of jokes on the shelves that afford generation after generation supplies of such humour. Sometimes, as he was growing up, he had thought vaguely of the time when he would be telling people of his own engagement; he had made in his mind momentary sketches of himself, proud, happy, laughing, and a little embarrassed, in a circle of his relatives and friends who would be clamorous with loud felicitations and jocose inquiries. This very vision had come to him on his journey home so vividly that he had chuckled aloud suddenly, in his berth at night, surprising and somewhat abashing himself with the sound

The picture had not been a successful prophecy he perceived as he walked up and down in his dressing-gown and slippers. Something appeared to have gone wrong somewhere in a mysterious way; and he could not understand what it was, could only pace and grieve, and puzzle himself. Even his talk with Martha Shelby had lacked the stimulating gaiety he expected, though she had been "mighty sweet and sympathetic," as he thought; and as for the interview with his grandmother, he must simply try to forget that! So he told himself, and shivered abruptly, recalling the awful-

ness of her parting instructions. His mother and father had been kind—"just lovely"—but with them, too, something important had been lacking; he could not think why; and so walked and walked without much satisfaction or relief.

An hour after he had left the library there was a knock on his door; and he opened this tall and heavily panelled walnut barrier to admit his father, who looked a little worried.

"Dan," he said, coming in;—"I'm afraid I've got to get you to do something that won't be much fun for you."

"Yes, sir."

"Your aunt Olive's just telephoned me she's in a little trouble to-night."

"Yes, sir," Dan repeated. His aunt Olive, his father's widowed sister-in-law, was often in a little trouble of one kind or another, and the Oliphant family had learned to expect a call for help when she telephoned to them. "Yes, sir. Does she want me?"

"Guess she does," his father said. "Both the children took sick at the same time yesterday morning, she says. Mabel seems to be getting along all right, but Charlie's in a high fever. You see there's an epidemic of la grippe all over town—that's what's the matter with 'em, the doctor thinks; but so many people have got it she can't find a nurse to save her life. Says she's hunted high and low and there simply isn't one to be had, and it seems Charlie's delirious; and he's strong, for fourteen; it's hard to keep him in bed. I offered to go myself, but she said she'd heard you were back in town, so she wondered if you wouldn't come over and sit up with him just a night or so until she——"

"You tell her I'll be right there," Dan had thrown off his dressing-gown and was in a chair, drawing on a shoe. "Tell her——"

"I told her so. You needn't break your neck getting over there, Dan. I don't think there's any particular hurry. She just said——"

"I know, sir. She gets scared about Charlie mighty easy;

but still I might as well move along, I guess," Dan said, and continued the hurried resumption of his clothes.

His father stood watching him, and seemed to be a little troubled, showing a tendency toward apologetic embarrassment. "Oh—ah, Dan——" he said, and paused.

"Yes, sir?"

"I—ah—we—don't want you to think——"

"Think what, sir?"

"Why, about your young lady—you took us by surprise, Dan. We weren't looking for what you told us, and so it took your mother and me a little bit off our feet, as it were, Dan."

"I—I suppose so," Dan said. "I expect I didn't go about it with any intelligence in particular, likely. I expect I ought to have——"

"No, no. *You* were all right, Dan. Only as we weren't just looking for it, we've been afraid we didn't seem as hearty about it as we should have."

"Oh, that's all right." Dan was embarrassed in his turn. "You were—you were both just lovely about it, sir. I didn't expect—I mean, it isn't the kind of thing there's any call for you and mother to make a big jollification and fuss over. I wasn't expectin' anything like that."

"No," his father said thoughtfully, "I suppose not. Only we've been afraid you might have been a little disappointed in the quiet way we took it."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Well, I hope not. And anyway, Dan, we *are* glad about it, if you're sure you are."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"And we want you to know we're *with* you, Dan. We're with you and for you, and we stand by you," Mr. Oliphant continued; then paused, and concluded with a haste not altogether fortunate—"whatever happens."

"Yes, sir," Dan said, seeming to flinch a little, though meekly; and his father at once added an amendment to the awkward phrase.

"Of course, we think only the pleasantest things will hap-

pen, Dan. And we want you to understand that this house must be home for anybody that belongs to you as much as it is for the rest of us. You know we feel that way, don't you, son?"

"Yes, sir. I do hope to bring her here, if you'll let me. I've been thinkin' about it a great deal, and I believe this town is my town"—Dan flushed a little as he spoke—"and I want to prove it, and I want Lena to learn to feel about it the way I do. I believe she'd miss something out of her life if she didn't. And I want you all to learn what a noble girl she is. I know you will, father."

"Why, of course!" Mr. Oliphant took his son's hand and shook it. "We didn't happen to say it downstairs, but we do congratulate you, Dan. As far as anybody can tell from a photograph"—he paused again here, then finished with a great heartiness of voice—"why, as far as you can tell from that, why, she looks like—she looks like a mighty pretty girl."

"Yes, sir." Dan smiled with a little constraint. "There's something else I want to talk over with you when we get time enough. I've got hold of a big idea, father."

"Have you, my boy?"

"It's about our future," Dan said nervously. "I mean Lena's and mine." He hesitated, then went on: "I expect it sounds like big talk from a little man, but I believe it's goin' to be a great thing for the future of our city, too."

Upon this his father's expression of friendly concern became complicated by evidences of a slight inward struggle, but he was able to respond with sufficient gravity: "Do you, Dan? What is it?"

"It's an idea for a big development, sir. I mean a development in the way this city's commenced to grow."

"Indeed?"

"I guess I better tell you another time, sir; it's got lots of details, and I'm afraid I ought to be gettin' on over to Aunt Olive's now, sir."

"I suppose so," Mr. Oliphant said, relinquishing his son's hand. "I only wanted to say—about your engagement—it's

all right with us, old fellow, and we just hope *we'll* be all right with *her*."

Dan was touched. His father spoke with feeling, and the young man could not trust his eyes to be seen. He hurried out into the spacious upper hall, not looking back, though he said: "Yes, sir; thank you," in a choked voice. Then, when he was halfway down the stairs, he called cheerfully: "I'll let you know to-morrow morning if there's anything much the matter with young Charlie. I'll be home for breakfast, anyway, and I'll tell you about my idea then, too. It's goin' to be a mighty big thing, father!"

"I hope so, my boy," Mr. Oliphant returned; and although there was moisture in his own eyes, he had difficulty in restraining, until the front door closed, a tendency to laughter.

CHAPTER VI

THAT green bronze swan of the fountain in the broad yard next door to the Oliphants' should have been given a new interpretation this season; the open beak, forever addressing itself obliquely to the eastern sky, might well have been thought to complain to heaven of the spiteful hanging on of winter. It was a winter that long outwore its welcome, and then kept returning like a quarrelsome guest forcing his way back to renew argument after repeated ejectments;—the Shelbys' swan was fortunate to be of bronze, for a wet snow filled that exasperated-looking beak of his choke-full one morning a month after the lilacs had shown green buds along their stems. Then, adding mockery to assault, this grotesque weather spent hour after hour patiently constructing a long goatee of ice upon the helpless bird.

Martha Shelby knocked it off late in the afternoon, though by that time the western sun had begun to make all icicles into opals, radiant with frozen fire and beautiful. "Insulting thing!" Martha said, as she brought the ferrule of her umbrella resentfully against the icicle, which broke into pieces that clattered lightly down to the stone basin below. "Of all the Smart Alecks I ever knew I think the worst one's the weather!"

Her companion, a thin young man with an astrakhan collar to his skirted long overcoat, assented negligently. He had happened to overtake her as she walked up National Avenue from downtown, and was evidently disposed to extend the casual encounter at least as far as her door, for he went on with her in that direction as he spoke.

"Yes, I dare say. Nature, in general, has a way of taking liberties with us that we wouldn't tolerate from our most intimate friends. I suspect if we got at the truth of things

we'd find that most of our legislation is really an attempt to prevent Nature from getting the better of us."

"Murder!" said Martha. "That's too deep for me, Harlan! Let's go on talking about poor old Dan and things I can understand. Come into the house and I'll give you some tea; you're the only man-citizen I know in town who likes tea. I ought to warn you that papa thinks there's something queer about you since that day after the matinée when you came in and had tea with me. He thought it was bad enough, your being at the matinée—papa says if an old man is seen at a matinée it looks as if he's gone bankrupt and doesn't care, but if it's a young man he must be out of a job and too lazy to look for a new one—and for any man not only to go to a matinée, but to drink tea afterwards, well, papa was terribly mystified about anybody named Oliphant doing such a thing! He can't imagine a man's consenting to drink tea except to help fight off a chill."

"Oh, I know!" Harlan said. "I realize it's a terrible thing for one to do, only three generations away from the pioneers."

As Martha chattered she had opened one of the double front doors, which were unlocked, and now she preceded him into the large central hall, floored with black and white squares of marble. A fine staircase, noble in proportions and inevitably of black walnut, followed a curving upward sweep against curved walls to the third story; while upon both sides of the hall, broad and lofty doorways, with massive double doors standing open, invited the caller to apartments heavily formal in brown velvet and damasks of gold.

In obedience to a casual wave of Martha's hand, as she disappeared through a doorway at the other end of the hall, Harlan left his overcoat and hat upon a baroque gold console-table and entered the drawing-room to his left. Here a fire of soft coal sought to enliven a ponderous black-marble mantelpiece, and Harlan, warming his hands, gazed disapprovingly at the painting hung upon the heavy paper of the wall above. This painting was not without celebrity, but after looking at it seriously for several minutes Harlan shook

his head at it, and was caught in the act by Martha, who came in with a light step behind him.

"Don't scold the poor thing, Harlan!" she said; and, as he turned, a little startled, he took note again of a fact he had many times remarked before: she moved with a noiseless rapidity unusual in so large a person. Moreover, her quickness was twice in evidence now; for she had changed her dark cloth dress for a gown of gray silk; and as final testimony to her celerity, when she sat in a chair by the fire and crossed her knees, a silken instep of gray was revealed between the silver buckle of her slipper and the hem of the long skirt she wore in the mode of that time.

"You're like lightning, Martha," Harlan said;—"but not like thunder. I didn't even hear you come into the room. What is it you don't want me to scold?"

"Poor papa's Corot."

"I wasn't scolding it. I was only thinking: What's the use of having a Corot if you hang it so high and so much against the dazzle of the firelight that nobody can see it."

"Oh, that doesn't matter to papa," Martha said cheerfully. "Papa doesn't care to see it; and he doesn't care whether anyone else sees it or not. He bought it in the summer the doctor made him go abroad, after mamma died. Somebody in Paris convinced him he ought to own an important picture. They took him first to see a Bougereau and he got very indignant. So they apologized and hurried out this Corot and told him who Corot was; so he bought it. All he cares about is that he owns it; he doesn't think about it as a thing to *look* at any more than the bonds in his safety-deposit boxes. He knows they're there, and they're worth just so much, and they're his; and that's all he cares about. You know papa runs the house to suit himself."

"No," Harlan returned skeptically. "I can't say I quite know that."

"You don't?" She laughed and went on: "Well, he does; especially when he gets set in his head. A few of papa's notions are just molasses, but most of 'em are like plaster of

Paris;—if you don't change 'em in a hurry before they set you never *can* change 'em! That's the trouble just now; he's turned into plaster of Paris about poor Dan's land operations, confound him!"

She uttered this denunciation with a sharpness of emphasis not ill-natured, but earnest enough to make Harlan look at her seriously across the small table just set between them by a coloured housemaid.

"You've been trying to alter your father's opinion of Dan's commercial ability, have you?" he inquired.

"Yes, I have," she answered crisply. "What's the matter with the business men of this town, anyway? Why won't they help Dan do a big thing?"

At this Harlan allowed his eyes to fall from the troubled and yet spirited inquiry of her direct gaze; he looked at the cup he accepted from her, and frowned slightly as he answered: "Of course they think he's a visionary. The most enthusiastic home boomer in the lot doesn't dream the town'll ever reach out as far as Dan's foolish 'Addition.'"

"How do you know it's foolish?"

"Why, because the population would have to double to reach even the edge of his land, and this town hasn't the kind of impetus that develops suburbs. You know what sort of place it is, yourself, Martha. It's only an overgrown market-town, and an overgrown market-town is what it'll always be."

"Don't you like it?" she asked challengingly. "Don't you even like the town you were born in and grew up in?"

"That sounds like Dan. His latest phase is to become oratorical about the enormous future of our own, our native city —since he bought the Ornaby farm! I suppose I like it as well as I like any city except Florence. I don't think it's as ugly as New York, for instance, because the long stretches of big shade trees palliate our streets half the year, and nothing palliates the unevenness and everlasting tearing down and building up and digging and blasting and steam-riveting of New York. But I do hate the crudeness of things here."

"That's the old, old cheap word for us," she said. "'Crude'!"

Harlan laughed. "You *have* been listening to Dan, the civic patriot! Crudeness isn't *our* specialty; the whole country's crude, Martha."

"Compared to what? China?"

"You'll be telling me all about our literary societies and women's clubs and the factories, if I don't take care," he returned lightly. "How dreadful all that is!" He sighed, and continued: "I suppose you've been trying to convince your father he ought to extend one of his street-car lines out into the wilderness toward Dan's 'Addition.' Is that what you've been up to with the old gentleman, Martha?"

"Yes, it is," she said quickly. "If he doesn't, how are people to get out there?"

"Quite so! That's one reason why everybody downtown is laughing at Dan. Your father will never do it, Martha. Have you any idea he will?"

"Not much of one," she admitted sadly, and shook her head. "He doesn't understand Dan's theory that the car line would pay for itself by fares from the people who'd build along the line."

"No, I shouldn't think he'd understand that—at least not very sympathetically!"

"Dan isn't discouraged, is he?" she asked.

"No, he isn't the temperament to be discouraged by anything. It's a matter of disposition, not of facts, and Dan was born to be a helpless optimist all his life. For instance, he still believes that when he marries his Miss McMillan and brings her here to live, grandmother will learn to like her! Yet he ought to know by this time that grandmother's a perfect duplicate of your father in the matter of plaster of Paris. I suppose you've seen Miss McMillan's photograph, Martha?"

Harlan glanced at her as if casually, but she answered without any visible embarrassment: "Oh, yes; he brought it over, and talked of her a whole evening. If the photograph's like her——" She paused.

"It's one of those photographs that *are* like," Harlan observed. "My own judgment is that she's not precisely the girl to put on a pair of overalls and go out and help Dan clear the underbrush off his 'Addition.'"

"Is he doing that himself? I haven't seen him for days and days."

"No," said Harlan. "You wouldn't, because he *is* doing just about that. I believe he has five or six darkies helping him; but he keeps overalls for himself out there in a shed. He gets up before six, drives out in his runabout, with a nose-bag of oats for his horse under the seat, and he gets home after dark ready to drop, but still talking about what a success he's going to make of the great and only 'Ornaby Addition.' He wears shabby clothes all the time—he seems not to care at all how he looks—and Saturdays he comes home at noon and spends the rest of the day downtown making orations to bankers and business men, especially your father."

"To no effect at all," Martha said gloomily.

"Oh, but I think he's had an extraordinarily distinct effect!"

"What effect is it?"

"Well, I'm afraid," Harlan said slowly;—"I'm afraid he's been successful in making himself the laughing stock of the town."

"They—they think he's just a joke?"

"Not 'just' one," the precise Harlan replied. "They think he's the biggest one they've ever seen."

Martha uttered a sound of angry protest, though she did not speak at once, but stared frowningly at the fire; then she turned abruptly to Harlan. "Why don't you help him?"

"I? Well, he hasn't asked me to help him, precisely. Did he tell you I——"

"No; he didn't say anything about you. But why don't you?"

"As a matter of fact," Harlan explained, a little annoyed, "he didn't ask me for help, but he did want me to go in with him on strictly business grounds. He was certain that if I

joined him as a partner, it would be a great thing for both of us. He wanted me to do the same thing he did—invest what grandfather left me in making the Ornaby farm blossom with horrible bungalows and corner drug-stores."

"And you wouldn't," Martha said affirmatively.

"Why should I, since I don't believe in his scheme?"

"But why couldn't you believe in Dan himself?"

"Good heavens!" Harlan exclaimed, and uttered a sound of impatient laughter. "I've never looked upon Dan as precisely a genius, Martha. Besides, even if by a miracle he could do something of what he dreams he can, what on earth would be the use of it? It would only be an extension of ugliness into a rather inoffensive landscape. I don't believe he can do it in the first place; and in the second, I don't believe in doing it even if it can be done."

"Don't you?" she asked, and looked at him thoughtfully. "What do you believe in, Harlan?"

"A number of things," he said gravely. "For instance, I don't believe in kicking up a lot of dust and confusion to turn a nice old farm into horrible-looking lots with hideous signboards blaring all over 'em."

"How characteristic!"

"What is?"

"I asked you what you believed in," she explained. "You said you believed in 'a number of things,' and went straight on: 'For instance, I don't believe——'"

"Yes," he said, "I was keeping to the argument about Dan."

Martha laughed at his calm sophistry, but was content to seem to accept it and to waive her point. "What do your father and mother think of 'Ornaby Addition'?"

"Oh, you know them! They understand as well as anybody that it's all folly, but they don't say so to Dan. I think poor father would even put something in just to please Dan, if he could spare it after what he's lost in bad loans this year."

"How about Mrs. Savage?"

"Grandmother!" Harlan was amused at this suggestion.

"Dan has to keep away from her; she's taken such a magnificently healthy prejudice against his little Miss McMillan she won't talk to him about anything else, and Dan can't stand it. Not much chance for 'Ornaby' there, Martha!"

"No; she *is* a plaster of Paris old thing!"

"Inordinately. She's always been set about *me*, Martha," Harlan remarked with a ruefulness in which there was a measure of philosophic amusement. "She's always maintained that I'd never amount to anything—I have the terrible faults of being an egotist and smoking cigarettes—but she's sometimes admitted she thought Dan might. That's why she's furious with him about throwing himself away on this 'spoiled ninny of a photograph girl'—her usual way of referring to Miss McMillan. Grandmother's twice as furious with him as if she hadn't always been like you, Martha."

"Like me? How?"

"I mean about your feeling toward Dan and me." Harlan smiled, but his eyes were expressive of something far from amusement. It was as if here he referred to an old and troubling puzzlement of his, but had long ago resigned himself to the impossibility of finding a solution. "I mean she's like you because she's always thought so much more of Dan than she has of me, Martha."

"Perhaps it's because you've never seemed to think much of anything, yourself," she said gently. "Perhaps we're apt to like people best who do a great deal of liking themselves."

"I might like to have you like me, Martha," Harlan ventured, and there was a quiet wistfulness about him then that touched her. "I might like it better than you know."

She looked at him gravely. "I do like you," she said. "I like you anyhow; but even if I didn't, I'd like you because you're Dan's brother."

Harlan sighed, but contrived a smile to accompany his sigh. "Yes; I've always understood that, Martha; and you're not at all peculiar in your preference. Not only you and grandmother, but everybody else likes Dan much better than me."

"And yet," Martha said, a smouldering glow in her kind eyes, "you tell me that everybody's laughing at him."

"Haven't you heard so yourself?"

"Yes, I have," she cried angrily. "But how can they, if they like him?"

"Isn't it plain enough? They like him because he's a democratic, friendly soul, and they laugh at him because he's so absurd about the Ornaby farm."

"And you think he's got to do the whole thing absolutely alone?"

"Why, no," Harlan said, correcting her lightly, "I don't think he's going to be able to do the whole thing at all. He'll get part way and then of course he'll have to quit, because his money'll give out. What he has left may last him a year or even longer, if he keeps on just doing with his little gang of darkies and himself."

"And in the meantime, he'll also keep on being a 'laughing stock'? That's what you said, didn't you?"

"I don't think it was an exaggeration," Harlan returned, defending himself, for her tone was sharply accusing. "After all," he went on, with placative lightness, "isn't it even rather a triumph in its way? You see, Martha, it isn't every young man of his age who'd be well enough known to occupy that position."

"A laughing stock?"

"Why, yes. Don't you see it means a degree of prominence not at all within the reach of every Tom, Dick, and Harry? For instance, *I* couldn't touch it: I don't know enough people; but Dan's one of those men of whom it's said, 'Oh, everybody in town knows *him!*' So, you see, since he's run wild over this Ornaby Addition, why, he actually has the whole town laughing at him."

"Since he's run wild!" she echoed scornfully. "And you say you don't exaggerate! How has he 'run wild'?"

"Ask your father," was Harlan's response, delivered quietly, though with some irritation; and Martha said sharply that she would, indeed; but this was mere retort,

signifying no genuine intention on her part, for she knew well enough what her father would say. He had been saying it over and over, every evening of late; and her discussions with him of Dan Oliphant and "Ornaby Addition" had reached that point of feeble acrimony at which a participant with any remnant of wisdom falls back upon a despairing silence—a silence despairing of the opponent's sanity. Martha had no mind to release her father from the oppression of this silence of hers, merely to hear him repeat himself.

She knew, moreover, that Harlan had not far overshot the mark when he intimated that Dan had become the laughing stock of the town; nor was it grossly an exaggeration to describe him as "making orations to bankers and business men, especially your father." The enthusiast for "Ornaby Addition" had indeed become somewhat oratorical upon his great subject; and the bankers and business men to whom he made speeches not only laughed about him, as did their secretaries and clerks and stenographers, distributing this humour widely, but often they laughed at him and rallied him, interrupting him as he prophesied coming splendours.

"You'll see!" he would answer, laughing himself, albeit rather plaintively. "You can sit there and make all the fun o' me you want to, but the day'll come when you'll wish you'd had a hand in makin' this city what it *is* goin' to be made! It isn't only the money you'd get out of it, but the pride you'd take in it, and what you'd be able to tell your grandchildren about it. Why, gentlemen, ten years from now——" Then he would go on painting his air castles for them while they chuckled or sometimes grew noisily hilarious.

But the toughest and most powerful of them all declined to chuckle; there was little good-nature and no hilarity left in dry old Mr. Shelby. He was seventy, and, as he crisply expressed himself, at his age he hated to have his time wasted for him; he didn't see any pleasure in listening to the goings-on of a fool-boy about two minutes out of school!

This viewpoint he went so far as to communicate to Dan directly, as the latter stood before him in the old gentleman's office. For that matter, Mr. Shelby seldom cared to be anything except direct; it was his declared belief that directness was the only thing that paid, in the long run. "Usin' a lot of tact and all that stuff to spare touchy people's vanity, it's all a waste of energy and they only hate you worse in the long run," he said. "So I'm not goin' to trouble to use any tact on *you*, young Mr. Dan Oliphant!"

He was a formidable old figure as he sat in his mahogany swivel-chair, which every instant threatened to swing him about to face his big, clean desk again with his back to the visitor. Neat with an extremity of precision, this old man had not altered perceptibly in appearance for many years, not even in his clothes; he was now exactly as he was in Dan's childhood. The gray chin-beard was the same precisely trimmed short oblong, and no whiter; the same incessant slight frown was set between the thin gray eyebrows; the same small black necktie showed a reticent bow beneath the flat white collar that was too large for the emaciated neck; and the same clean white waistcoat was worn under the same black "cutaway" coat; the same gray-and-black-striped trousers descended to the same patent-leather "congress gaiters." Twice a year Mr. Shelby gave an order—always the same order—to his tailor; he never left his house in the evening; had not taken any exercise whatever since his youth; went to bed always at nine o'clock; always ate exactly the same breakfast of oatmeal, an egg, and one cup of coffee; was never even slightly indisposed; and appeared to be everlasting. Compared to such a man, granite or basalt might be imagined as of an amiable plasticity; yet the ardent Dan hopefully persisted in seeking to remodel him.

"Why, of course, Mr. Shelby," he assented;—"that's just the way I want you to feel; I don't want you to use any tact on me. I don't need it. When I'm layin' out a proposition like this before a real business man, all I want is his attention to the facts."

"What facts?"

"The facts of the future," the enthusiast replied instantly. "The future——"

"What d' you mean talkin' about the facts of the future? There ain't any facts in the future. How you goin' to have any facts that haven't happened yet? A fact is something that's either happened or *is* happening right now."

"No, sir!" Dan exclaimed. "The present is only a fraction of a second, if it's even that much; the past isn't any time at all—it's gone; everything that amounts to anything is in the future. The future is all that's worth anybody's thinkin' about. That's why I want you to think about the future of your car lines, Mr. Shelby."

"Oh, you do, do you?" the old gentleman said sardonically. "You think I *ain't* thinkin' about it, so you called around for the fourth time to draw my attention to it?"

"Yes, sir," the undaunted young man replied. "I don't mean exactly you don't think about it; I just mean you don't seem to me to consider all the possibilities."

"Such as old Ranse Ornaby's ex-hog-wallow and corn-patch, for instance?"

"That ex-hog-wallow and corn-patch, Mr. Shelby," Dan said proudly, "consists of five hundred and thirty-one and two-thirds acres. If you'd only drive out there in your carriage as I've asked you to——"

"Good heavens!" Mr. Shelby interrupted. "I chopped wood there thirty years before you were born! D'you think I got to hitch up and go buggy-ridin' to know where Ranse Ornaby's farm is?"

"It isn't his, sir," Dan reminded him. "It belongs to me. I only meant, if you'd come out there I think you'd see some changes since I've been layin' it out in city lots."

"City lots? What city you talkin' about? Where's any city in that part o' the county? *I* never knew there was any city up that way."

"But there is, sir!"

"What's the name of it?"

"The city of the future!" Dan proclaimed, his eyes brightening as he heard his own phrase. "*This* city when it begins to reach its growth! Why, in ten years from now——"

"Ten years from now!" the old man echoed, with angry mockery. "What in Constantinople you talkin' about? D'you know you're gettin' to be a regular by-word in this town? Old George Rowe told me yesterday at his bank, he says you got a nickname like some Indian. It's 'Young Ten-Years-From-Now.' That's what they call you: 'Young Ten-Years-From-Now'! George Rowe asked me: he says, 'Has Young Ten-Years-From-Now been around your way makin' any more speeches?' he says. He says that's the nickname everybody's got for you. It's all over town, he says."

Dan's colour heightened, but he laughed and said: "Well, I expect I can stand it. It isn't a mean nickname, particularly, and I don't guess they intend any harm by it. I shouldn't be surprised if it turned out to be good advertisin' for the Addition, Mr. Shelby."

"*I* should," the old man remarked promptly. "I'd be surprised if anything turned out good for the Addition!"

"No," said Dan. "That nickname might do a lot o' good; though the truth is I'm not talkin' about ten years from now nearly as much as I am about only two or three years from now. *Ten* years from now this city'll be way out *beyond* Ornaby Addition!"

"Oh, lord! Hear him holler!"

"It will," Dan insisted, his colour glowing the more. "It will! Why, you go down to the East Side in New York and look at the way people are crowded, with millions and millions more every year tryin' to find footroom. They can't do it! They've *got* to go *some*where. They've got to spread all over the country. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of 'em have got to come *here*. That's not all; we've got the finest climate in the world, and the babies that get born here practically all of 'em *live*, and there's tens of thousands of 'em born every year. Besides that, this city's not only the natural market of a tremendous agricultural area, but the rail-

roads make it an absolutely ideal manufacturing centre. Why, it's just naturally impossible to *stop* the growth that's comin', even if anybody wanted to, and the funny thing to me is that so few of you business men see it!"

"You listen to me," the old man said;—"that is, unless you got the habit of talkin' so much you *can't* listen! You been tellin' the men that run this town quite a few things about our own business lately; it's time somebody told you something about your own. You're a good deal like your grandfather Savage used to be before your grandmother sat on him and never let him up. He was always wantin' to put his money into any fool thing and lose it, until she did that, and I hear she tried to stop *you*, but you didn't have the gumption to see she's right. Now, look here: I've been here since there was a population of seven hundred people chillin' every other day, eatin' quinine by the handful, and draggin' one foot after the other out of two-foot mud if they had to get off a horse and walk anywhere. Last census we had a hundred and eighty thousand. I've seen it all! D'you expect you can tell *me* anything about this town?"

"No, sir; not about the history of it or anything that's past. But about the future——"

"You listen!" Shelby commanded irascibly. "You come around here blowin' out your chest and tellin' us old settlers that this town has grown some——"

"No, sir; I know you know all about that a thousand times better'n I do. I only use it to prove the town's goin' to keep *on* growin'. Why, Mr. Shelby, ten years from now——"

"Great Gee-mun-nently!" the old man shouted. "Can't you listen at *all?* Of *course* it's goin' to keep on growin', but not the way you think it is. It's already reached its land size, or mighty near it, because there's plenty vacant lots inside the city limits—hundreds and hundreds of 'em—and people want to live near their business; they don't want to go way out in the country where there ain't any sewers nor any gas nor city water."

"But they'll *get* all that, Mr. Shelby. They will as soon as

there's enough of 'em to make it pay the water company and the gas company to run their pipes out; and there'd *be* enough of 'em, if you'd lay even a single track out to——"

"Out to Ranse Ornaby's frog pond!" the old man interrupted angrily. "You think if I'd throw away a hundred thousand dollars like so much dirt, that'd bring the millennium to the old hog-wallow, do you, young man? Look out that window behind you What's the biggest thing you see?"

"The First National Bank Building."

"Yes, sir. Eleven stories high, and that crazy Sheridan Trust Company's got plans to put up a block higher'n that on borrowed money. I expect, myself, to see Sheridan in the penitentiary before he gets through; but at that he's got more business caution than you have. People'll build up in the air, not only for business, but to live in flats, but they won't go 'way out to a hog-wallow in the country when there ain't a reason on earth for 'em to. You seem to think people ride on street-cars for pleasure! Well, I've had some experience in the business, and I can tell you they don't, except in mighty hot weather; they ride on street-cars to get somewhere they want to *go;* and goodness knows nobody wants to go to Ranse Ornaby's farm."

"But, Mr. Shelby, if you'd listen just a minute——"

"I've listened all I'm a-goin' to," the old man said decisively. "This is the fourth time you been here tellin' me all about this town that wouldn't be here if it wasn't for me and some the other men you been lecturin' to about it. You go at me as if I'd just put up at the hotel and never saw the place before, and what's worse you've gone and got Martha so she keeps ding-dongin' at me till I can't eat my supper in peace! It's about time for you to understand it's no use."

"But, Mr Shelby, if you'd just let me put the *facts* before you——"

"Facts about what's goin' to happen ten years from now? No, sir!" The swivel-chair began to turn, making it clear that this interview had drawn to a close. "I thank you, but I can

make up my own facts, if I so desire!" And the back of the chair and its occupant were offered to the view of the caller.

Dan made a final effort. "Mr. Shelby, I hope you don't mean this for your last word on the subject, because just as sure as you're born the day will come when——"

"Will it?" the old man interrupted; and turned his head angrily, so that his neat beard was thrust upward by his shoulder and seemed to bristle. "You go teach your grandma Savage to suck eggs," he said with fierce mockery, "but don't come around here any more tellin' *me* where I better lay my car tracks!"

"Well, sir, I——"

"That's *all!*"

"Yes, sir," Dan said, a little depressed for the moment.

But in the hall, outside the office, he recovered his cheerfulness, and, after consulting a memorandum book, decided to call on Mr. George Rowe, the president of the First National Bank. Since yesterday Dan had thought of several new things that were certain to happen within the next ten years.

CHAPTER VII

NO FIGURE was more familiar to the downtown streets of those days than that of the young promoter of Ornaby Addition. Always in a hurry and usually with eyes fixed on what appeared to be something important in the distance, he had the air of a man hastening to complete a profitable transaction before train-time. Now and then, as he strode along, his coat blowing out behind him in the spring breeze, his gaze would be not upon the distance, but eagerly engaged in computations, with the aid of a shabby memorandum book and an obviously dangerous fountain pen. Moreover, the shabbiness of the memorandum book was not out of keeping with the rest of him; for here again Harlan's sketch of his brother failed to exaggerate. Dan's metropolitan gloss had disappeared almost in a day, and though it might make a brief reappearance upon Sundays, when he walked to church with his mother and swung the gold-topped cane as he talked earnestly to her of Ornaby Addition, yet for the rest of the week he did seem to be almost unconscious, as Harlan said, of what he wore; so much so that his mother gently scolded him about it.

"What will people think of me," she asked, "if you insist on going about with two buttons off your vest, and looking as if you haven't had anything pressed since the flood? Whenever I do get one of your suits to look respectable, you wear it out to the farm and forget to put your overalls on, and then you climb trees, I suppose, or something else as destructive; and after that you rush off downtown where everybody sees you looking like the Old Scratch—that's what your father said, and it troubles him, too, dear. You were so particular all through college, always just the very pink of fashion, and now, all of a sudden, you've changed the way

some young men do when they've married and get care-worn over having two or three babies at home. Won't you try to reform, dear?"

He laughed and petted her, and went on as before, unreformed. Clerks, glancing out of the great plate-glass windows of a trust company, would giggle as they saw him hurrying by on his way from one office to another, rehearsing to himself as he went and disfiguring his memorandum book with hasty new mathematics. "There it goes again!" they would say, perhaps. "Big Chief Ten-Years-From-Now, rushin' the season in year-before-last's straw hat and a Seymour coat! Look at him talkin' to his old notebook, though! Guess that's about all he's got left he *can* talk to without gettin' laughed to death!"

Dan found one listener, however, who did not laugh, but listened to him without interruption, until the oration was concluded, although it was unduly protracted under the encouragement of such benevolent circumstance. This was Mr. Joseph Kohn, the father of Dan's former partner in the ornamental bracket business. Kohn & Sons was an establishment formerly mentioned by National Avenue as a "cheap Jew dry-goods store"; and prosperous housewives usually laughed apologetically about anything they happened to have bought there. But, as the years went by, the façade of Kohn & Sons widened; small shops on each side were annexed, and the "cheap dry-goods store" was spoken of as a "cheap department store," until in time it became customary to omit the word "cheap." Old Joe Kohn was one of the directors of the First National Bank; he enjoyed the friendship of the president of that institution, and was mentioned in a tone of respect even by the acrid Shelby.

In the presence of this power in the land, then, Dan was profuse of his utmost possible eloquence. Unchecked, he became even grandiose, while the quiet figure at the desk smoked a cigar thoughtfully; and young Sam Kohn, not yet admitted to partnership with his father and older brother, but a floorwalker in the salesrooms below, sat with his elbows

on his knees and his chin on his fists, listening with admiration.

"My gracious, Dan," he said, when the conclusion at last appeared to have been reached;—"you are certainly a natural-born goods seller! I wish we had you on the road for us."

"Yes, Sam," his father agreed pleasantly. "He talks pretty good. I don't know as I seldom heard no better."

"But what do you think of it?" the eager Dan urged. "What I want to know: Don't you think I've made my case? Don't you believe that Ornaby Addition——"

"Let's wait a minute," Mr. Kohn interrupted quietly. "Let's listen here a minute. First, there's the distance. You say yourself Shelby says he ain't goin' to put no car line out there; and it's true he ain't."

"But I told you I haven't given that up, Mr. Kohn. I expect to have another talk with Mr. Shelby next week."

"*He* don't," Mr. Kohn remarked. "He spoke to me yesterday a good deal about it at bank directors' meeting. No, Mr Oliphant; don't you expect it. You ain't goin' to git no car line until you got people out there, and how can you git people out there till you git a car line? Now wait!" With a placative gesture he checked Dan, who had instantly begun to explain that with enough capital the Addition could build its own tracks. "Wait a minute," Mr. Kohn went on. "If you can't git enough capital for your Addition how could you git it for a car line, too? No, Mr. Oliphant; but I want to tell you I got some idea maybe you're right about how this city's goin' to grow. I've watched it for thirty years, and also I know something myself how the people been comin' from Europe, and how they're still comin'. It ain't only them;—people come to the cities from the country like they didn't used to. The more they git a little bit education, the more they want to live in a city; that's where you're goin' to git a big puportion the people you claim's goin' to crowd in here.

"But listen a minute, Mr. Oliphant; that there Ornaby's farm is awful far out in the country. Now wait! I'm tellin' *you* now, Mr. Oliphant, please. Times are changin' because

all the time we git so much new invented machinery. Workin' people are willin' to live some ways from where they work, even if they ain't on a car line. Why is that? It's because they can't afford a horse and buggy, but now they got bicycles. But you can't git 'em to live as far out as that there Ornaby farm, even with bicycles, because except in summer the roads ain't nothing but mud or frozen ruts and snow, and you can't git no asphalt street put out there. The city council wouldn't ever——"

"Not to-day," Dan admitted. "I don't expect to do this all in a week or so, Mr. Kohn. But ten years from now——"

"Yes; that's it!" Mr. Kohn interrupted. "You come around and talk to me ten years from now about it, and I might put some money into it then. To-day I can't see it. All at the same time if I was you I wouldn't be discouraged. I won't put a cent in it, Mr. Oliphant, because the way it stands now, it don't look to me like no good proposition. But you already got your own money in; you should go ahead and not git discouraged because who can swear you won't git it out again? Many's the time I seen a man git his money out and clean up nice when everybody believed against him, the way they all believe against this here Ornaby's farm right to-day." He rose from his chair and offered his hand. "I got a business date, Mr. Oliphant, so I must excuse. I'm glad to talk with you because you're old friends with Sam here, and he always speaks so much about you at our family meals at the home. Good-bye, Mr. Oliphant;—I only got to say I'm wishin' you good luck, and hope you keep on at it till you win. You got as good a chance as many a man, so don't give it up."

Dan repeated the last four words a little ruefully as he went down in the elevator with Sam, who was his escort. "'Don't give it up.' Well, not very likely!" He laughed at the idea of giving it up; then sighed reflectively. "Well, anyhow, he's the first one I've talked to that said it. Most of the others just had a grand time laughin' at me and told me *to* give it up! I appreciate your father's friendliness, Sam."

Sam shook his head. "It ain't that exactly," he said, with a cautious glance at the young man who operated the elevator. "Wait a minute and I'll tell you." And when they had emerged upon the ground floor, he followed his friend through the busy aisles and out to the sidewalk. "It's this way, Dan," he said. "You ain't got any bigger ideas of how we're goin' to have a great city here than what papa has; he don't talk so much in public, as it were, the way you been doin', but home I wonder how many thousand times we got to listen to him! That's why you had him so interested he sat still like that. But he ain't goin' to put money in it now. I know papa awful well; it ain't his way. I wouldn't say it to anybody but you, Dan, but I expect right now he'll own a good many shares stock in that Ornaby farm some day."

"What?" Dan cried, surprised. "Why, you just said——"

"I said he won't put money in now," Sam explained, with a look of some compassion. "Papa won't ever take a gamble, Dan; he ain't the kind. He'll wait till you go broke on this Ornaby farm; then, if it looks good by that time, he'll get a couple his business friends in with him, maybe, and they'll send some feller after dark to buy it for thirty-five cents. He wouldn't never mean you no ill will by it, though, Dan."

"Oh, I know that," Dan said, and laughed. "But you're mistaken about one thing, Sam, and so's he, if he counts on it."

"What's that?"

"I'm not goin' broke on it. Why, Sam, ten years from now——"

"You told papa all about that," Sam interrupted hurriedly. "You talked fine about it, and I wish I could run off an argument half as good. It's a shame when a man's got a line o' talk like that he ain't got a good proposition behind it."

"But it *is* good. Why, even *two* years from now——"

"Yes; by then it might be," Sam said. "But now you got an awful hard gang to get any backin' out of in the business men of our city, Dan. They didn't make their

money so easy they're willin' to take a chance once in a while, you see."

"I expect so," Dan sighed; and then, consulting his memorandum book, shook hands with this sympathetic friend and hurried away to see if he could obtain another interview with John W. Johns, the president of the Chamber of Commerce. He was successful to just that extent; he was readily granted the hearing, but failed to arouse a more serious interest in Ornaby Addition than had hitherto been shown by this too-humorous official.

Mr. Johns was cordial, told Dan that he did "just actually love to listen about Ornaby Addition"; that he was always delighted to listen when he had the time, and went on to mention that he had said openly to the whole Chamber at the Chamber's Friday lunch, "Why, to hear young Dan Oliphant take on about Ornaby Addition, it's as good as a variety show any day!" Mr. Johns was by no means unfriendly; on the contrary, he ended by becoming complimentary on the subject of Dan's good nature. "Of course, you aren't goin' to get any business man to sink a dollar in that old farm, my boy; but I do like the way you stand up to the roastin' you get about it. 'Tisn't every young fellow your age could take everybody's whoopin' and hollerin' about him without gettin' pretty hot under the collar."

"Oh, no," Dan said. "If I can get some of you to put in a little money, I don't care how you laugh."

"But you can't," Mr. Johns pointed out. "That's why I kind o' like the way you take it. We don't put in a cent, and we get hunderds of dollars' worth o' fun out of it!"

"I guess that's so," Dan admitted, and he went away somewhat crestfallen in spite of Mr. Johns's compliment.

As Sam Kohn said, these men of business had not made their money easily; they had made it by persistent caution and shrewdness, by patient saving, and by self-denial in the days of their youth; they were not the men to "take a chance once in a while." Orations delighted them but would never convince them; and as the weeks and months went by, Dan

began to understand that if Ornaby Addition was to be saved, he alone would have to save it.

He worked himself thin at the task; for he was far from losing heart and never admitted even to himself that he was attempting an impossibility. His letters to Lena were filled with Ornaby Addition, of which her own ideas appeared to be so indefinite that sometimes he wondered if she didn't "skip" in her perusal of his missives. She wrote him:

It seems to me you must spend a great deal of time over that Ornaby thing. Is it really so beautifully interesting as you say it is? Of course I do understand you're immensely keen on it though, and I'm glad it will be such a great success and all that. I certainly hope it will because as I warned you I'm an extravagant little wretch and always in a row with papa about it. But I do hope you don't feel you'll have to spend lots of time out there after we're married. Of course we must be as practical—disgusting word!—as we can, but I do hope you'll arrange so that you won't need to do more out West than just oversee this Ornaby affair for a week or so every year, because I adore you and I'll want you to be with me all the time.

Cousin Oliver has some works—I don't know what it is they make but I think it's metal things for plumbers or something equally heinous!—and *his* works are out in the West somewhere, too. He only has to go there once or twice a year and gets home again the next night. I do hope you'll be sure to make arrangements like that about yours. At any rate, be sure not to have to go out there *next* year, not unless you just hate your poor Me! I couldn't bear for anything to interfere with our having a full year abroad. I won't let you leave me in Nice or Mentone and run back to your old Ornaby thing for weeks and weeks! If you dare to try anything like that, sir, I'll flirt my little head off with some dashing maître d'hôtel! Write instantly and tell me nothing shall spoil our full year abroad together. Instantly! Or I'll think you hate me!

This letter gave Dan a bad hour as he sat in his room at home trying to construct a reply to it. The full year abroad now considered so definite by Lena had been rather sketchily mentioned between them in New York; he had agreed, with a faint and concealed uneasiness, that a wedding journey to

southern France, if he could "manage" it, would be lovely; but afterwards he had forgotten all about it; and, being in his twenties, he was yet to learn how often the casual implications of men in their tender moments are construed by women to be attested bonds, sworn to, signed and sealed. So now, as he answered Lena, he found himself on the defensive, as if the impossibility of the full year abroad were a wrong to her, an unintended one, but nevertheless a wrong for him to explain and for her to forgive. He added to his opening explanations:

We *might* go to Europe two or three years from now. Of course I don't expect to make the Addition my life work. I hope to be going into other things as soon as I've put this on its own feet. You show you've got a wonderful business head in your letter, dear, because a man's business *ought* to be just the way you say—it ought to be so he only needs to oversee it. The broad principles of business aren't often understood by a woman, and it makes me proud that you are one of the few who can. You do understand them so well I see it must be my own fault I haven't given you the right idea about Ornaby Addition. For one thing, you see, an addition isn't a works exactly, though not as unlike as it might seem, because both need a great deal of attention and energy to get them started. What I am trying to do is to lay out an Addition to the city, making streets and building lots that afterwhile will become part of the city, and my land won't be really an addition until that is accomplished. It is a wonderful piece of land, with superb trees and good clean air, though I have to cut down many of the trees, which I hate to do, in order to lay out the building lots.

What troubles me so much since reading your last letter is that I don't see any way to leave here at all, except for a few days for our wedding and a stop at Niagara Falls if you would like that—it is a sight you ought to see, dear, and well worth the time—on our way here. I'm afraid I didn't think enough about the trip abroad when we spoke of it and didn't fully understand it was a settled thing, as you do. That is all my fault and I'm going to be mighty sorry if this is a big disappointment to you. I would sooner cut off my right hand than let anything be a disappointment to you, Lena, and I don't know just how it happened that I didn't know before how much you were counting on spending the year in Europe.

Another thing that hurts me and I hardly know how to speak of it is this: I ought to have consulted you before I plunged into this work —I see that now—but I got so enthusiastic over it I just went ahead, and now it's impossible for me not to keep *on* going ahead with it, and that means we *have* to live *here*, Lena. I did hope to persuade you to be willing for us to live here, but I only hoped to persuade you to it, and now I'm afraid this may look to you as if I forced it on you. That would just break my heart, to have you believe it, and I never thought of such an aspect when I bought the Ornaby farm. I just thought it would be a big thing and make us a fortune and help build up my city. But now it's done and all my money's tied up in it, we'll have to settle down till the job's put through—don't ever doubt it's going to be a big thing; but I see how you *might* look at it. If you do look at it as forcing you, please just try to forgive me and believe I did mean for the best for both of us, Lena, dear.

My mother and father want us to live with them, and I think it would be the best and most sensible thing for us to do. There's a great deal of room and if we rented a house we couldn't get a very comfortable or good-looking one, I'm afraid, because all we can possibly spare of what I have left will just *have* to go into the Addition.

I'm so afraid this letter will worry you. I don't know what to do or what else to say except please write as soon as you can to tell me how it strikes you, and if you can say so please say you don't think I meant to force our living here, and you still care something about me.

The trouble is you don't know what a great place to live this is, because you haven't ever been anywhere except a few places East and Europe. You would soon get used to the difference between living here and New York and after that you'd never want to live anywhere else. Of course it's mighty pleasant to go to New York or Europe for a visit now and then, and most of the people you'd meet here do that, just as you and I would hope to when we could afford it, but for a place to settle down and *live* in, I know you'd get to feeling we've got the most satisfactory one on the face of the globe right here. Won't you write me right away as soon as you read this and tell me you don't think I've tried to force anything, and anyhow no matter what you think you forgive me and haven't changed toward me, dear?

CHAPTER VIII

BUT Lena did not respond right away. Instead, she allowed a fortnight to elapse, during which her state of mind was one of indecision and her continuous emotion a sharp irritation; both of these symptoms being manifest in an interview she had with her brother George, one day, when she finally decided to consult him. "It's so indecently unfair!" she complained. "It *is* forcing me; and his letter was a perfectly abject confession of it. He admits himself he's compelling me to go out to that awful place and live with him."

"How do you know it's awful?" George inquired mildly. "He's the most likable chap I ever knew, and *he* comes from there. Doesn't that look as if——"

"No, it doesn't. Just think of being compelled to listen to everybody speaking with that awful Western accent! I can stand it in him because I like his voice, and he's only one; but imagine hearing nothing *else!*" Lena shivered, flinging out her beautiful little hands in a despairing gesture, illuminated by tiny stars of fire from her rings. "Just imagine having hundreds of 'em talking about 'wat*urr*' and 'butt*urr*' all day long!"

"Oh, I dare say they speak of other matters at intervals," George said. "If that's the supremest agony you have to face, Lena, I don't see why you're kicking up such a row with yourself. I'd rather like to go out there, myself."

"What in the world for?"

"Well, for one reason," he answered seriously, "because I like Dan, but principally because I'd do well to get away from New York."

"To live?" she cried incredulously. "I could understand

that, if you meant you'd like to get away in order to live in Paris, but to want to go out and bury yourself in one of those awful Western——"

"Paris!" George exclaimed. "For me? I suppose your idea is a short life but a merry one!"

"Why not? It might be better than living to a hundred on 'wat*urr*' and 'butt*urr*'! What's the matter with you and New York?"

"Nothing's the matter with New York except that it's got so many sides it can be whatever one chooses to make it, so that a weak character like me gets too many chances to increase his weaknesses here. There's no question about it, Lena; I'm a weak character. I've proved it to myself too many times to doubt it. A smaller city is pretty much one thing, but New York is anything because it's everything. The trouble is with me I've slid into making a New York for myself that I can't break away from unless I emigrate. My New York is Uncle Nick's offices for as few hours a day as I can fool 'em with; and after that it's three clubs and the Waldorf, the Holland House, Martin's, Jack's, two or three roulette holes, incidental bars, and sometimes the stage door of the Casino. The rest of the time I live in a hansom cab. A pretty thing, isn't it!"

"Then why don't you change it?"

"Because I can't. I can't get myself away from the crowd I've picked up, and that's the life they lead. Funny, too, I don't really like one of 'em, yet I can't keep away from 'em because I'm in the same ruts and talk the same lingo and drink the same drinks. That's the real trouble, I suppose, and there's a certain future ahead of me—a pleasant one to look forward to!"

"What is?"

"Drunken stockbroker," George replied with laconic despondency. "That's me, if I live to forty."

"I'd rather be one than buried in a mudhole on the prairie," said Lena. "I'd rather be anything than that; yet it's precisely what my thoughtful fiancé informs me I have no choice

about. I think perhaps he'll *learn* whether I have or not, though!"

"Better think it over," George advised, with a thoughtful glance at his sister's flushed and petulant face. "It might be the best thing for you."

"What!"

"It might," he insisted. "You've made a pretty quick-stepping New York of your own, Lena. Tea at Sherry's means mighty little tea for you, my dear. A man told me the other day he'd never met a human being who could survive as many Benedictines in the afternoon as you can. Besides that, you get too much music."

"You're crazy!" Lena cried. "I *live* on music!"

"No, you don't," he said. "You keep yourself woozy with it. You go on music debauches, Lena. You don't take it as an art; you take it as an excitement. You keep your emotions frothing with it, and that's why you can't get along without it. If you hadn't been in the habit of getting yourself woozy with music, that Venable affair would never have happened."

"George!" she said sharply, and her eyes, already angry, grew more brilliant with increased emotion. "Shame on you!"

"Oh, well——" he said placatively.

"It's a thing you have no right to make me remember."

"Other people remember it," he said, with a brother's grimness. "You needn't think because nobody outside the family ever speaks of it to you it isn't thought of and referred to when you're spoken *of*."

She looked pathetic at this, and reproached him in a broken voice. "Unmanly! One would think my own—my own brother——"

"Your own brother is about the only person that *could* speak of it to you in a friendly way, Lena. You know how the rest of the family speak of it to you—when they do."

"It's so unfair!" she moaned. "Nobody ever understood——"

"We needn't to go into that," George said gently. "I think myself it was your musical emotions on top of a con-

stitutional lack of discretion. Oh, I don't blame you! I've spent too much time trying to cover my own indiscretions from the family. I'm really more the family black sheep than you are, only you had worse luck; that's all. I only mention it to get you to think a little before you talk of throwing Dan Oliphant over rather than to go and live in the town he's so proud of."

She wiped her eyes, choked a little, and protested feebly: "But the two things haven't any connection. What—what's Venable got to do with——"

"Well, you make me say it," George remarked as she paused. "I think you understand as well as I do; but if you want me to be definite, I will."

"Not *too* definite, please, George!"

"How can I be anything else? There isn't any tactful way to say some things, Lena. You may get proposals from some of these men you meet at parties and father don't know about——"

"Never mind, please, George. Do you have to be quite so——"

"Yes," he said decisively. "Quite. The family have made it clear what they'll do, if you ever try again to marry one of the wrong sort, like Venable."

"'The wrong sort!'" she echoed pathetically, though with some bitterness toward her brother. "He was the most interesting man I ever knew, and a great artist. He was——"

"Unfortunate in his domestic experiences," George interrupted, concluding the sentence for her dryly. "And you were unfortunate in overlooking—well, to put it tactlessly, in seeming to have no objection to what I'm afraid I must call his somewhat bigamous tendencies, Lena."

"George!"

"My dear, I'm trying to say something helpful. Eligibles of our own walk in life enjoy dancing with you or buying Benedictines for you, but after Venable, none of 'em would be likely to——"

"That's enough, please, George!"

"No," he said, "I'm explaining that Dan's the best thing in sight. The family weren't too pleased about him, I admit; but they couldn't help seeing that. For my part, I think it might be the making of you."

"I don't care to be made, thanks."

"I mean you might have a chance to improve, living somewhere else," he explained calmly. "But more than that, Dan Oliphant looks up to you so worshipfully—he pictures you as such spotless perfection—it seems to me you'd just have to live up to his idea of you. If you want to know the truth, I took such a fancy to him I wasn't too delighted on his account when I saw he was getting serious about you; but when he seemed to be so much so, I thought maybe it might turn out pretty well for both of you. It's good sometimes for a man to have such ideals, and it's always good for a woman to live up to 'em. Besides, you do care about him, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "I wouldn't have said I'd marry him if I didn't. I really did fall a lot in love with him, but that's not being in love with spending my life in some terrible *place*, is it? And besides I'm not going to live up to his ideals; nothing bores me more than pretending to be somebody I'm not. I get enough of that with the family, thanks!"

"You think you won't try to be the girl he believes you are?" George asked gravely.

"Don't be silly! Why on earth should I pretend to be anybody but myself?"

"In that case," George said, "I hope you'll write poor Dan that you refuse to be compelled and have decided to break your engagement. He'll be pretty sick over it, I'm afraid, but I think you'd both live happier—and longer!"

With this brotherly tribute, spoken in a rueful humour, he departed, leaving her at her small French desk, where the sheet of blue-tinted note paper before her remained blank, except for a few teardrops. In spite of his parting advice, George had relieved neither her indecision nor her conviction that she was being ill-treated by her lover. Nevertheless, except for one thing, she was inclined to accept that advice.

The one deterrent was the group of people defined by George and herself, in tones never enthusiastic, as "the family." Aunts, uncles, and cousins were included, all of them persons of weight, and some of them of such prodigious substance in wealth as to figure as personages in the metropolis; though all McMillans were personages to themselves, on the score of what they believed to be clan greatness due to historical descent and hereditary merit. To their view, New York was a conglomerate background for the McMillans and a not extensive additional gentry, principally English and Dutch in origin. Beyond the conglomerate background, the McMillans permitted themselves to be aware of certain foreigners as gentry, and also of some flavourings of gentry, similar to their own, in Philadelphia, Boston, and one or two smaller cities, but there perfected civilization ended. All else they believed to be a kind of climbing barbarism, able to show forth talent or power, perhaps, in a spasmodic way, or even isolated greatness, as in Abraham Lincoln, but never gentry, except in imitations laughably pinchbeck.

To the McMillan view, Lena's adventure with that dashing sculpture, half genius and half Grecian-shaped meat, Perry Venable, had placed her gentryship in jeopardy, damaged her as a McMillan;—in fact, her infatuation for so conspicuous a baritone could not avoid being itself conspicuous; it "made talk," and in answer to the talk she had announced her engagement to him. Then, in the face of the family's formidable opposition, she made preparations for a clandestine wedding, which Mr. Venable was unable to attend on account of his wife's arrival from Poland. Thereupon, standing alone against the shock of heavy McMillan explosives, Lena's impulsive loyalty in defending the godlike baritone led her to make an unfortunate statement: great artists were not to be bound by the ordinary fetters upon conduct, she said;—and this prelude not being accepted as of any great force and originality, she followed it hotly with the declaration that she had long been aware of the Polish lady's existence.

It was in great part to this admission of hers that the unwitting Dan Oliphant owed the family's consent to his suit for the hand of a McMillan. A McMillan who got herself talked about, and then confessed, not in the manner of confession but with anger, that she had not been deceived—such a McMillan would conceivably do such a thing again, and a respectable barbarian bridegroom might be the best substitute for those unfortunately obsolete family resources in times of youthful revolt, *lettres de cachet* and the enforced taking of veils. But, in good truth, Dan may have owed to Lena's celebrated admission more than the family's consent, for the family's austerity of manner toward Lena became so protracted an oppression that she was the readier to be pleased with anything as cheerfully different from that family as Dan was.

Without doubt, too, he owed it to this McMillan austerity that she did not write to him now and break her engagement with him. The Venable affair was two years past, but the austerity went on, unabated. Dan was at least an avenue of escape, and, as Lena had said to her brother, she was "a lot in love" with him. Yet she hesitated, angry with him because he could not offer what she wanted, and half convinced that escape from what she hated might be an escape into what she would hate more. So she wrote to him finally:

You said you loved me! That isn't quite easy to believe just now. Why did you let me go on counting upon our having a year abroad? I'm afraid I'll never be able to understand it. I don't know what to say or what to do. I think the best thing you could do would be to come East at once. Maybe I could understand better if we talked it over together. It seems to me that you couldn't have cared for me with any depth or you wouldn't have allowed things to be as you say they are. A man can always do anything he really wants to, and if you had *really* wanted—oh, I know it's futile to be writing of *that!* You simply didn't care enough, and I thought you did! The only thing for you to do is to come at once. We must settle what's to be done, because I can't go on in the state of unhappiness I've suffered

since your last letter. Maybe you can convince me that you do care a little in spite of having forced me to give up what I counted on. If you do convince me, I suppose there's no use putting off things—I don't want a large, fussy weding. If we *are* going ahead with it, we might as well get it over. I don't know what to do, I admit that; but I'm still *Your* half-heartbroken

LENA.

CHAPTER IX

NOT long ago there was found everywhere in the Midland country a kind of wood then most characteristic of it but now almost disappeared, a vanishment not inexpressive of nature's way of striking chords; for the wood is no longer so like the Midlands as it was. But in the days when Ornaby Addition struggled in embryo, hickory still grew in profusion, and that tough and seasoned old sample of it, Mr. Shelby, withstood at his office desk the hottest summer in several years. He permitted himself the alleviation of a palm-leaf fan, and when his open carriage came for him at a little before six o'clock, every afternoon, he had the elderly negro coachman drive him out to the end of the cedar-block pavement of Amberson Boulevard before going home; but on the day that began the hottest hot spell of the summer he forebore to indulge himself with this excursion, albeit he forebore somewhat peevishly.

"We got to go straight home this evening, Jim," he said, and added, "Plague take it!"

"Yes, suh," the coachman assented. "She lay it down she want me ca'y you home quick as I kin git you. I tell 'er bettuh not be *too* quick or I'm goin' have me two nice dead trottin' hosses. Hoss die same as a man, day like this, an' it ain't cool off airy bit sense noon. Look to me like gittin' hottuh, 'stid o' simmerin' down some, way ought to!" He widened one fat brown cheek in a slight distortion, producing a sound not vocal, but correctly interpreted by the horses as the call for an advance. Then, as they obediently set off at a trot, he chuckled; for although he complained of the heat he really liked it; and was not ill-equipped for it in shapeless linen, a straw hat, and slippers. "Tell me be'n five six whi' men drop down dade right out in a middle the sidewalk to-

day," he said. "Way it keepin' up, they be mo' of 'em befo' mawnin'. Look at them hosses bustin' out an' lathun theyse'f a'ready, an' I ain't trot 'em a full square yit!"

"You needn't push 'em on my account," Mr. Shelby said. "*I*'m not in any hurry."

"No, suh," the coloured man agreed, smiling over some private thought of his own. "I guess you ain't! But she said, hot or no hot, git you home early's I could fix it." And then he laughed outright.

"Plague take it!" Mr. Shelby said again; for what amused the coachman made the master all the more peevish. Unquestionably, he was a deeply annoyed old gentleman, in spite of the fact that he was the coolest looking human being up and down the full length of National Avenue, into which thoroughfare the carriage had turned.

The long avenue might well have been mistaken for a colony of invalids and listless convalescents. Damp and languid citizens, their coats over bared forearms, made their painful way homeward from downtown, mopping fiery brows and throats; other coatless citizens, arrived at home, reclined melting in wicker rocking-chairs upon their verandas or lawns, likewise mopping as they melted; while beside them their wives and daughters, in flimsiest white, sat fanning plaintively. Here and there the stout father of a family stood near his front fence and played a weak and tepid stream from the garden hose over his lawn, or sprinkled the street, while his children, too hot to be importunate, begged lifelessly to relieve him of the task. The leaves of the massed foliage that made the street a green tunnel hung flaccidly gilding in the sun; and the sun abated not at all as it approached its setting. The air drooped upon the people with a weight too heavy to let them move readily, yet for breathing there seemed to be no air; and it had no motion, so that the transparent bits of paper, where the popcorn man or the hokey-pokey man had passed, lay in the street and on the sidewalks as still as so much lead.

"Seems like ev'thing wilted down flat," Mr. Shelby's fat

coachman remarked as they turned into the driveway at home. "Me, I reckon if you's to take little slim string o' cobweb up on the roof an' push 'er off, she'd fall ri' down on the groun' same as a flatiron. Look fountain, Mist' Shelby!" He laughed happily, and waved his whip toward the bronze swan. "That duck, let alone he ain't got stren'f 'nough to spout, he ain't but jes' hodly able to goggle his th'oat little bit."

The swan was indeed put to it to eject a faint spray, for all over the town the people were making such demands on the water, already low with the dry season, that the depleted river whence it came threatened to disappear unless the drought were broken. However, neither drought nor heat had to do with Mr. Shelby's peevishness, which visibly increased when the carriage turned into his driveway;—what made him frown so bitterly was the sight of his daughter, charmingly dressed in fabrics of gossamer weight, her shapely hands gloved in spite of the weather, and her hazel eyes bright under a hat of ivory lace. She was sitting upon a wicker bench on the big veranda, but when the lathered bay horses trotted through the driveway gate, she jumped up and hurried to meet her father as he stepped out upon a stone horseblock near the veranda steps.

"Papa!" she cried, "you must hurry; we're terribly late! I wouldn't have waited for you, but I was afraid you wouldn't go unless I took you."

"I wouldn't," he said grimly. "You bet your sweet life I wouldn't!"

"*Won't* you hurry?" she urged.

"What for? Ain't I dressed up enough? All I'm goin' to do is wash my hands."

"Then do," she cried, as he moved to go indoors. "*Please* hurry!"

"Never you mind," he returned crossly. "I don't usually take more'n half a jiffy to just wash my hands, thank you!" And as he disappeared he was heard to mutter, not without vehemence: "Plague take it!"

A few moments later he reappeared, not visibly altered except that his irritated expression had become one of revolt. "Look a-here!" he said. "I don't see as *I*'m called upon to promenade over there and join in with all this high jinks and goin's-on!"

"Papa——"

"I don't mind an old-fashioned party," he went on. "I used to go to plenty of 'em in my time, but when all they got for you to do is listen to half the women in town tryin' to out-holler each other, why, you bet your bottom dollar I'm through!"

"But, papa——"

"No, sir-ree!" he protested loudly. "You can well as not go on over there without me. Why, just look at the crowd they got in there already."

He waved his hand to the neighbouring domain on the south, where the crowd he bitterly mentioned was not in sight, but was indicated by external manifestations. Open family carriages, surreys, runabouts, phaetons, and "station wagons" filled the Oliphants' driveway, and, for a hundred yards or more, were drawn up to the curb on each side of the avenue. Coloured drivers sat at leisure, gossiping from one vehicle to another, or shouting over jokes about the hot weather. The horses drooped, or, with heads tossing at intervals, protested against their checkreins—and one of them, detained in position by a strap fastened to a portable iron weight, alternately backed and advanced with such persistence that he now and then produced enough commotion to bring profane bellows of reproof from the drivers, after which he would subside momentarily, then misbehave again.

One of the coachmen decided to settle the matter, and, sliding to the ground from the hot leather front cushion of a "two-horse surrey," went to chide the nervous animal. "Look a-me, hoss!" the man shouted fiercely. "You gone spoil ev'ybody's pleasure. Whyn't you behave youse'f an' listen to music?" He pointed eloquently to the Oliphants' open windows, whence came the sound of violins, a harp and

a flute. "You git a chance listen nice music when you stan' all day in you' stall, hoss? An' look at all them dressed-up white folks goin' junketin'. What they goin' think about you, you keep on ackin' a fool?" Here, to clarify his meaning to the disturber, he gestured toward some young people—girls in pretty summer flimsies and young men in white flannels—who were going in through the iron gateway. "You think anybody goin' respect you, cuttin' up that fool way? You look out, hoss, you look out! You back into my surrey ag'in I'm goin' take an' smack you so's you won't fergit it long's you live!"

Mr. Shelby, becoming more obdurate on his veranda, found this altercation helpful to his argument. "Why, just listen! That crowd's makin' so much noise I'd lose my hearin' if I went in there. I won't do it!"

"But, papa," his daughter pleaded, "it isn't the people in the house who are making the noise; it's that darkey yelling at a horse. You've *got* to come."

"Why have I?"

"Because you're their next-door *neighbour*. Because it's a time when *all* their friends should go."

"Why is it?" he asked stubbornly. "What they want to make all this fuss over her for, anyway? I guess, from what I hear, her folks didn't make any fuss over *them* in New York. Just barely let 'em come to the weddin' and never even asked 'em to a single meal! I should think the Oliphant family'd have too much pride to go and get up a big doin's like this over a girl when her family treated them like that!"

"*Please* come," Martha begged. "All that matters to Dan's father and mother is that he *is* married and they want their old friends to meet the bride and say a word of welcome to her."

"Well, *I* don't want to say any welcome to her. Dan Oliphant hadn't got any more business to get married right now than a muskrat; he's as poor as one! I don't want to go over there and take on like I approve of any such a foolishness."

"You're only making excuses," Martha said, frowning, and she took his arm firmly, propelling him toward the ve-

randa steps. "You know how they'd all feel if their oldest neighbour didn't go. You *are* going, papa."

"I won't!" he protested fiercely; then unexpectedly giving way to what at least appeared to be superior physical force, he descended the steps. "Plague take it!" he said, and walked on beside his daughter without further resistance.

At the Oliphants' open front doors they seemed to step into the breath of a furnace stoked with flowers. Moreover, this hot and fragrant breath was laden with clamour, the conglomerate voices of two hundred people exhausting themselves to be heard in spite of one another and in spite of the music.

"Gee-mun-*nently!*" Mr. Shelby groaned, as this turmoil buffeted his ears. "Why, this is worse'n a chicken farm when they're killin' for market! I'm goin' straight home!" And he made a serious attempt to depart through the portal they had just entered, but Martha had taken his arm too firmly for him to succeed without creating scandal.

A head taller than her father, she was both powerful and determined; and his resistance could be but momentary. She said "*Papa!*" indignantly under her breath; he succumbed, indistinctly muttering obsolete profanity; and they went into a drawing-room that was the very pit of the clamour and the flowery heat, in spite of generous floor space and high ceilings. The big room was so crowded with hot, well-dressed people that Martha had difficulty in passing between the vociferous groups, especially as many sought to detain her with greetings, and women clutched her, demanding in confidential shouts: "What do you *think* of her?"

But she pressed on, keeping a sure hold upon her outraged father, until they reached the other end of the room; for there, in a trellised floral bower, with all the flowers wilted in the heat, Dan Oliphant stood with his bride and his father and mother.

The reception party appeared to be little less wilted than the flowers; Mr. Oliphant and Dan, in their thick frock coats, suffering more than the two ladies; but all four smiled with

a brave fixity, as they had been smiling for more than an hour; and the three Oliphants were still able to speak with a cordiality that even this ordeal had been unable to exhaust.

The bride might have been taken for a somewhat bewildered automaton, greatly needing a rewinding of its mechanism. In white satin, with pearls in her black hair, she was waxy pale under the rouge it was her habit to use, and she only murmured indistinguishably as Mr. Oliphant presented his guests to her. The faint smile she wore upon her lips she did indeed appear to wear, and to have worn so long that it was almost worn out;—no one could doubt that she longed for the time when she could permit herself to get rid of it. As a matter of fact, she granted herself that privilege when Mr. Oliphant presented Miss Shelby to her; for the smile faded to an indiscernible tracing as Lena found the statuesque amplitude of Martha towering over her. The small bride looked almost apprehensive.

"I hope—I do hope you'll be able to like me," Martha said, a little nervously. "I live next door, and I hope—I do hope you'll be able to." Then, as Lena said nothing, Martha gave Mr. Shelby's arm a tug, unseen, and brought him unwillingly to face the bride. "This is my father. He's a new neighbour for you, too."

The old gentleman made a slight, hostile duck with his head. "Pleased to meet ye, ma'am," he said severely.

At that the bride seemed to be astonished. "What?" she said.

"I bid you good afternoon, ma'am," he returned, ducked his head again, and passed on as rapidly as he could.

Martha whispered hurriedly to Dan: "She *is* beautiful!" and would have followed her father, but Dan detained her.

"Martha, will you help us to get her to like it here?" he said. "You see she's such an utter stranger and everything's bound to seem sort of different at first. I've been hoping you'd let her be your best friend, because you—you'd——"

"If she'll let me, Dan," Martha said, her voice faltering as she continued, "You know that I'd always—I'd always *want*

to——" She stopped, glancing back at Lena, whose own glances seemed to be noting with some interest the heartiness with which Dan still grasped the hand of this next-door Juno. "I know she's lovely!" Martha said; and she moved away to overtake her father, who had every intention of leaving the house at once, but found himself again balked by his daughter's taking his arm.

"What *you* so upset over?" he asked crossly. "What's the matter your face?"

"Nothing, papa. Why?"

"Looks as though you're takin' cold. It's the heat, maybe. Let's go."

"Not yet, papa."

"Look a-here!" he said, "I'm not goin' to promenade out in that dining-room and ruin my stomach on lemonade and doodaddle refreshments. It's suppertime right now, and I want to go home!"

"Hush!" she bade him. "It wouldn't be polite to rush right out. Just stay a minute or two longer; then you can go."

"But what's the *use?* I don't want to hang around here with all the fat women in town perspiring against my clo'es. I hate the whole possytucky of 'em."

"*Sh*, papa!"

"I don't care," he went on with husky vehemence. "Nothin' to do here except stare at the bride, and she's so little it don't take much time to see *her;* she's just about half your size—you made her seem like a wax doll beside you, and the way she looked at you, I guess she thought so, too. Anyway, she does look like a wax doll. Looks worse'n *that*, too!"

"No, no!"

"Yes, she does," he insisted. "She's got paint on her. Her face is all over paint."

"It isn't paint. It's only rouge."

"What's the difference? It ain't decent. She paints. She's got red paint on her cheeks and black paint on her eye-winkers. Looks to me like Dan Oliphant's gone and married a New York fast woman."

"Hush!" Martha commanded him sharply. "People will hear you!"

"I can't hardly hear myself!" he retorted. "Never got in such a gibblety-gabble in my born days. I tell you she paints! Her mother-in-law ought to take her out to a washstand and clean her up like a respectable woman. The Oliphant family ought to know what people'll take her for, if they let her go around all painted up like that. If she was *my* daughter-in-law——"

But here Martha's protest was so vehement as to check him. "Everybody *will* hear you! Be quiet! Look there!"

She caught her breath, staring wide-eyed; and, turning to see what had so decisively fixed her attention, he realized that the clamorous place had become almost silent. Old Mrs. Savage, leaning upon her grandson Harlan's arm, had entered the room and was on her way to the bride.

The guests made a passage for her, crowding back upon themselves until there was an aisle through which she and Harlan slowly passed. She was in fine gray silk and lace; and her hair, covered only in part by the lace cap, was still browner than it was white. But she could no longer hold herself upright as of yore; a cruel stoop had got into the indomitable back at last, and she was visibly tremulous all over. The emaciation, too, of such great age had come upon her; the last few months had begun the final shrivelling of everything except the self, but in her eyes that ageless self almost flamed;—it had a kind of majesty, for its will alone and no other force could have made the spent body walk. Thus, among these people who had known her all their lives, there was an awe of her, so that they had hushed themselves, silently making room for her to pass; and she was so frail, so nearly gone from life, that to many of them it seemed almost as if a woman already dead walked among them. They perceived that she could never again do what she was doing to-day, nor could any fail to comprehend in her look her own gaunt recognition that this was the last time she would thus be seen.

Slowly, with Harlan helping her, she went through the room, came to Lena, and stood before her, looking at her and making little sighing murmurs that told of the effort it cost her still to live and move. Then, in a voice not cracked or quavering, though broken a little, she said: "I thought so! But you're welcome."

Lena looked frightened, but Dan laughed and kissed his grandmother's cheek, talking cheerfully. "Well, this *is* an honour, grandma! We hardly hoped you'd come out in all this heat. We certainly appreciate it, grandma, and we'll never forget you thought enough of us to do it. It's just the best thing could happen to us in the world!"

His free and easy full voice released the guests from the sympathetic hush put upon them by the apparition; they turned to one another again and the interrupted chatter was loudly resumed; but Mrs. Savage extended her right arm and with her gloved hand abruptly touched the bride's cheek.

Startled, Lena uttered a faint outcry, protesting. "What —why, what do you mean?"

Mrs. Savage was looking fiercely at the tremulous fingertips of the white glove that had touched the rouged cheek. "*She's painted!*"

Dan laughed and patted the old lady's shoulder. "You'd better go and get some iced coffee, grandma," he said, and turned to his mother. "Couldn't we all go and get something cold now with grandma? I don't believe there are any more people coming and Lena's pretty tired, I'm afraid."

"I am," Lena said. "I really am." She came close to him, pleading in a faint voice: "For heaven's sake let me go up to my room and lie down. I can't stand any more!"

"Why, Lena——"

"Please let me go, Dan."

"Why—but——" he began. "Couldn't you stick out just a little longer? If we go to the dining-room with grandma I think it might please her. Besides, if the bride disappeared at her own reception I'm afraid they might think——"

"*Please*, Dan!"

"Well—but, dear——"

But Lena waited for no more argument; she made a gesture of most poignant appeal, slipped by him and went quickly out through a door that led into a rear hallway. Dan's impulse was to follow her, but he decided that his first duty led him in another direction, and joined his grandmother who was on her way to the dining-room. When he had helped Harlan to bring the old lady iced coffee and such accompaniments as she would consent to nibble, it was time to return to the drawing-room to say farewell to the guests; for, according to a prevalent custom, they could not depart without assuring him that they had enjoyed themselves.

He explained to them that the heat had been too much for Lena, received their messages of sympathy for her and their renewed congratulations for himself, and finally, when they were all gone, ran anxiously upstairs to her. He found her lying face downward upon her bed in her bridal gown, an attitude less of exhaustion than of agitation, though it spoke of both. Both were manifest, too, in the disorder of her curled black hair and in the way one of her delicate arms was stretched upward across the pillow with a damp handkerchief half clenched in the childlike fingers.

"Why, Lena——"

"You'd better let me alone!"

"But what is the matter?"

"Nothing!"

He touched the small hand on the pillow solicitously. "I'm afraid I let you get tired, dear."

"'Tired!'" she echoed, withdrawing her hand instantly. "'*Tired!*'" And with that she abruptly sat upright upon the bed, showing him a face misshapen with emotion. What added to the disastrous effect upon her young husband was that her movement completed the disorder of her hair so that some heavy strands of it hung down, with the string of pearls, still enmeshed, dangling unheeded against her cheek. The picture she thus presented was almost unnerving to Dan, who had never seen a woman so greatly discomposed. His

mother had wept heartbrokenly when her father died; but she had kept her face covered; and he had no recollection of ever seeing her with her hair in disorder.

"Why, Lena!" he cried. "What on earth——"

"Nothing!" she said, and laughed painfully, satirizing the word. "Nothing! Nothing at all!"

"But, dear——"

"Never mind!" She shivered, then sighed profoundly, and stared at him with curiosity, as if she were examining something unfamiliar. "So this is what it's going to be like, is it?" she asked.

"What?"

"I mean this *place!* These *people!* This—this *climate!*"

But here Dan was touched upon his native pride. "Climate? Why, this is the best climate in the world, Lena! There isn't any climate to compare with it! And as for this little warm spell just now, why, you see we do need *some* hot weather."

"Like *this?*"

"Why, certainly! You see this is the greatest corn belt in the country, dear. If it wasn't for a stretch or two of good corn-growin' weather like this every summer, the farmers wouldn't get half a crop, and there'd be a big drop in prosperity."

"And you'd *rather* have it hot like this, then?" Lena asked, seeming to find him increasingly strange. "You want the farmers to grow their corn, no matter what happens to your wife?"

"But, my goodness!" he cried, in his perplexity. "*I* don't run the weather, Lena! It don't make any difference how I might want it, the weather just *is* the way it is. Besides, we don't mind it so much."

"Don't you?" She laughed briefly, and shook her head as though marvelling at the plight in which she found herself, wondering how she had come to it. "No, I suppose you were born and brought up to such weather. I suppose that's why you didn't tell me about it before I came here. You prob-

ably didn't realize what this deathly suffocating air might do to the nerves of a human being who's always lived near the sea. And for your mother to make me stand hours in that oven, trying to talk to all those awful *people*——"

"Lena!" Dan was as profoundly astonished as he was distressed. "Why, those are the best people in town; they're our old family friends, and I don't know where in the world you'd expect to find better. What fault could you find with 'em, dear? They were all so cordial and pleasant, and so anxious to be friends with you, I thought you'd enjoy——"

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "'Enjoy!' Oh, yes!"

"What's the matter with 'em? Weren't their clothes——"

"Their clothes!" she echoed desperately. "What do I care about their clothes!"

"Then what——"

"On, don't!" she moaned. "Don't ask me what's wrong with such people!"

"But I do ask you, Lena."

"Don't! My life wouldn't be long enough to tell you."

"Well, I declare!" the dismayed young husband exclaimed, and sat down beside her on the bed.

But she leaned away from him as he would have put his arm about her. "Please don't try petting me," she said. "You'll never be able to make me stand such people. I couldn't! It isn't *in* me to!"

"This is just a little spell you've got, Lena; it won't last. In a few days you'll begin to feel mighty different, and then when you get to knowing mother a little better, and some of the younger people, like Martha Shelby——"

"Who's Martha Shelby?"

"You met her and her father this afternoon," Dan explained. "Harlan and I grew up with her, and she's one of the finest girls in the world. She's always just the same—cheerful, you know, and dependable, no matter what happens. You'll get mighty fond of her, Lena. Everybody always does."

"Was she that great hulking thing with the dried-up little old father that said, 'Pleased to meet ye, ma'am'?"

Dan laughed uneasily. "Why, Martha isn't 'hulking.' She's a mighty fine-lookin' girl! She's tall, but she isn't as tall as I am, and she's——"

"She *is* that big girl, then," Lena said with conviction. "I *hope* you don't intend to ask me to see anything of *her!*"

"But, Lena——"

"She's an *awful* person!"

"But you've just barely met her," he cried, his distress and perplexity increasing. "You don't know——"

"She was perfectly awful," Lena insisted sharply. "Do you *have* to let her call you 'Dan'?"

"Why, good gracious, everybody in town calls me 'Dan,' and Martha lives next door."

"I don't see why you need to be intimate with people merely because they live next door," Lena said coldly. "I suppose, though, in this heavenly climate you feel because a girl lives next door to you it's necessary to let her hold your hand quite a little!"

"But she didn't hold my hand."

"Didn't she? It seemed to me I noticed——"

"No, no, no!" he exclaimed. "I only wanted to stop her a minute to say I hoped she'd help make you like it here and be as good a friend to you as she's always been to me."

"I see. That's why you held her hand."

"But I didn't——"

"Of course not!" Lena interrupted. "Not more than five minutes or so! And *she's* the one you especially want me to be friends with! I never saw a more awful person."

"But what's 'awful' about her?"

Lena shook her head, as if in despair of him for not comprehending Martha's awfulness. "She's just awful," she said, implying that if he didn't perceive for himself why Martha was awful he hadn't a mind capable of being enlightened. "I suppose you expect me to be intimate with her father, too?"

Dan laughed desperately. "I wouldn't be apt to ask you to be particularly intimate with anybody his age, Lena."

"I hope not," she said, and became rigid, looking at him with a cold hostility that was new to his experience and almost appalled him. "I was afraid you might intend to ask me to be intimate with your grandmother."

Dan seemed to crumple; he groaned, grew red, apologized unhappily: "Oh, Lord! I was *afraid* that'd upset you, but I kind of hoped you'd forget it."

"'Forget it?' When she did it before everybody! Pawing me—croaking at me——"

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, "I was afraid it bothered you."

"'*Bothered*' me! Is that your word for it?"

"Nobody else noticed it, Lena," he went on. "Nobody except just our family——"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "The next-door person you admire so much was one of those that took it all in. She was in at the death—*my* death, thank you!"

"Lena, you don't understand at all. Nobody thinks anything about anything grandma does. You see she's a good deal what people call a 'privileged character.'"

"'Privileged?' Yes! I should say she takes privileges perhaps!"

"Oh, dear me!" he sighed. "Lena, you just mustn't mind it. You see, she belongs to two generations back, and besides I suppose most people here wouldn't know just what to make of your puttin' artificial colour on your face. For that matter, your own mother and sister used to be against it, even in New York, and probably people would take notice of it here a little more than they would there. I kind of hoped myself, when you got here——"

"How kind of you!" she said. "Possibly some day you'll understand a little of what I've had to go through since you brought me to this place. Yesterday, when we got here, I thought I just couldn't *live* in such heat. You're used to it; you don't know what it is to a person who'd never even imagined it. And in spite of the fact that I was absolutely prostrate with it, your mother informs me that she's invited people to come and shake my hand and arm off for two hours

in an oven. Then, because I'm so deathly pale that I look ghastly, I use a little rouge and am publicly insulted for it; after which my husband reproves me for trying to look a little less like a dead person."

Dan was miserable with remorse. "No, no, no! *I* don't mind your puttin' it on, Lena. I didn't mean to reprove you; I only——"

"You only meant to say your grandmother's insult was justified."

"But it *wasn't* an insult, Lena. After you get to know grandma better——"

"After I *what?*" Lena interrupted.

"You'll understand her better after you get to know her."

"After I *what?*" Lena said again.

"I said——"

"Listen!" she interrupted fiercely. "You must understand this. On absolutely no account must you expect me ever to go into that frightful old woman's house, or to see her, or to speak to her, or to allow her to speak to me. Never!"

"Oh, Lord!" Dan groaned; then rose, rubbed his damp forehead, crossed the room with a troubled and lagging step, and, upon the sound of a bell-toned gong below, turned again to his bride. "There's supper. Mother said we'd just have a light supper this evening instead of dinner. Could you——"

"Could I what?"

"Could you wash your face and fix your hair up a little?" he said hopefully, yet with a warranted nervousness. "It'll do you good to freshen up and eat a little. Except the family there'll be nobody there except—except——"

"Except whom?" she demanded.

"Well—except Martha," he faltered. "Mother asked her yesterday because she thought you'd—well, I mean except Martha and—and grandma."

Lena again threw herself face downward upon the bed; and when he tried to comfort her she struck at him feebly without lifting her head.

CHAPTER X

HALF an hour later he brought her a tray, a dainty one prepared by his mother, and set it upon a table close beside the bed.

"Here you are, dearie," he said gaily. "Jellied chicken, cold as ice, and iced tea and ice-cold salad. Not a thing hot except some nice crisp toast. You'll feel like running a foot-race after you eat it, Lena!"

She spoke without moving, keeping her face away from him. "Are those women still downstairs?"

"Who?"

"Your grandmother and that big girl—the awful one."

"You don't mean——"

"I asked you if they're still in the house."

"They're just goin' home, Lena. Martha told me to tell you how sorry she is you feel the heat so badly. Won't you eat something now, please, dear?"

"No, thank you."

"Please! You'll feel all right again if you'll eat something, and to-morrow morning we'll drive out to Ornaby Addition. *Then* you'll feel like a *queen*, Lena; because it's all yours and you'll see what it's goin' to do for us."

"Do you think it will get us away from here?" she asked in a dead voice.

"Well, by that time," Dan answered cheerfully, "I expect maybe you won't want to get away."

"'By that time,'" she said, quoting him dismally. "You mean it's going to be a *long* time?"

"Lena, I wish you'd just look at this tray. I know if you'd only look at it, you couldn't help eating. You'd——"

"Oh, hush!" she moaned, and struck her pillow a futile blow. "Someone told me once that you people out here always *were* trying to get everybody to eat, that you thought

just eating would cure everything. I suppose you and all your family have been eating away, downstairs there, just the same as ever. It makes me die to think of it! I've had delirium in fevers, but I never was delirious enough to imagine a place where there wasn't *some* mercy in the heat! There isn't any here; it's almost dusk and hotter than ever. I couldn't any more eat than if I were some poor thing cooking alive on a grill. What on earth do you want me to *eat* for?"

"Well, dearie," he said placatively, "I think it would strengthen you and make you feel so much better, maybe you'd be willing to—to——" He hesitated, faltering.

"To what?"

"Well, you see grandma's so terribly old—and just these last few months she's broken so—we know we can't hope to see much more of her, dear; and so we make quite a little fuss over her when she's able to come here. I did hope maybe you'd feel able to go down with me to tell her good-night."

At that, Lena struck the pillow again, and then again and again; she beat it with a listless desperation. "Didn't you *understand* what I said to you about her?"

"Oh, yes; but I know that was just a little nervousness, Lena; you didn't really mean it. I know you feel differently about it already."

"No!" she cried, interrupting him sharply. "No! No!" And then, in her pain, her voice became so passionately vehement that Dan was alarmed. "No! No! N*o!*"

"Lena! I'm afraid they'll hear you downstairs."

"What do *I* care!" she cried so loudly that Martha Shelby, in the twilight of the yard below, on her way to the gate, paused and half turned; and Dan saw her through the open window. "What do *I* care!" Lena screamed. "What do I *care!*"

"Oh, dear me!" he groaned, and though Martha hurried on he was sure that she had heard.

"I don't *care!*"

"Oh, dear me!" he groaned again, and went to close the door which he had thoughtlessly left open when he came into

the room. But, to his dismay, before he closed it he heard Mrs. Savage's still sonorous voice in the hall downstairs: "No, don't bother him. Harlan's enough to get me home. But if *I* had a daughter-in-law with tantrums I'd mighty soon cure her."

At that point Dan shut the door hurriedly, and went back to the bedside. "Lena," he said, in great distress, "if you won't eat anything, I just don't see what I can do!"

"You don't?" she asked, and turned to look at him. "It seems to me nothing could be simpler. You know perfectly well what you can do."

"What?"

"Take me out of this. Keep your promise to me and take me abroad."

"But I *can't* ,dearie," he explained. "You see I didn't realize it was a promise exactly, and now it's just out of the question. You see everything we've got is in Ornaby Addition and so——"

"Then sell it."

"What? Why, I wouldn't have anything left at all if I did that at this stage of the work. You see——"

"Then put a mortgage on it. People can always get money by mortgages."

Dan rubbed his forehead. "I've already got a mortgage on it," he said. "That's where the money came from I'm workin' with now." He sighed, then went on more cheerfully. "But just wait till you see it, Lena. We'll drive out there first thing to-morrow morning and you'll understand right away what a big thing you and I own together. You just wait! Why, two or three weeks from now—maybe only two or three days from now—you'll be as enthusiastic over Ornaby as I am!" He leaned over her, smiling, and took her hand. "Honestly, Lena, I don't want to brag—I wouldn't want to brag to you, the last person in the world—but honestly, I believe it's goin' to be the biggest thing that's ever been done in this town. You see if we can only get the city limits extended and run a boulevard out there——"

But here she startled him; she snatched her hand away and burst into a convulsive sobbing that shook every inch of her. "Oh, dear!" she wailed. "I'm trapped! I'm trapped!"

This was all he could get from her during the next half hour; that she was "trapped," repeated over and over in a heartbroken voice at intervals in the sobbing; and Dan, agonized at the sight and sound of such poignantly genuine suffering, found nothing to offer in the way of effective solace. He tried to pet her, to stroke her forehead, but at every such impulse of his she tossed away from his extended hand. Then, in desperation, he fell back upon renewed entreaties that she would eat, tempting her with appetizing descriptions of the food he had brought and, when these were so unsuccessful that she made him carry the untouched tray out into the hall and leave it there, he returned to make further prophecies of the restorative powers of Ornaby Addition.

Once she saw Ornaby, he said, she would be fairly in love with it; and he was so unfortunate as to add that he knew she would soon get used to his grandmother and like her.

Lena was growing somewhat more composed until he spoke of his grandmother; but instantly, as if the relation between this cause and its effect had already established itself as permanently automatic, she uttered a loud cry of pain, the sobbing again became convulsive; and Dan perceived that for a considerable time to come it would be better to omit even the mention of Mrs. Savage in his wife's presence.

Darkness came upon the room where Lena tossed and lamented, and the young husband walked up and down until she begged him to stop. He sat by an open window, helplessly distressed to find that whatever he did seemed to hurt her; for, when he had been silent awhile she wailed piteously, "Oh, heavens! Why can't you *say* something?" And when he began to speak reassuringly of the climate, telling her that the oppressive weather was only "a little hot spell," she tossed and moaned the more.

So the long evening passed in slow, hot hours laden with emotions that also burned. From the window Dan saw the family carriage return from Mrs. Savage's; the horses shaking themselves in their lathered harness when they halted on the driveway to let Harlan out. He went indoors, to the library as usual, Dan guessed vaguely; and after a while Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant came from the house and walked slowly up and down the path that led through the lawn to the gate. They were "taking the air"—or as much of it as there was to be taken—and, walking, thus together, the two figures seemed to express a congeniality Dan had never before noticed with attention, although he had been aware of it all his life. Both of them had retained their slenderness, and in the night were so youthful looking that they might have been taken for a pair of young lovers, except for the peacefulness seeming to be theirs. This emanation of a serenity between them suddenly became perceptible to their son as a surprising thing; and he looked down upon them wonderingly.

There came a querulous inquiry from the bed. "What on earth are you staring at?"

"Only father and mother. They're outdoors coolin' off."

"Good heavens!" Lena said. "Cooling off!"

"You're feelin' better now, aren't you, Lena?" he asked hopefully.

"'Better!'" she wailed. "Oh, heavens!"

Dan rested his elbows on the window-sill, and his chin on his hands. "They're comin' in, now," he said after a while. "They've had their little evening walk in the yard together. They nearly always do that when the weather isn't too cold."

"'Cold?' I suppose this place gets just as cold in winter as it does hot in summer!"

"It *does* get pretty cold here in winter sometimes," the thoughtless Dan said, with a touch of pride. "Why, last February——"

"Oh, heavens!" Lena wailed; and she began to weep again.

About midnight she was quiet, and Dan, going near her, discovered that she drowsed. His foot touched something

upon the carpet, and he picked up the string of artificial pearls, put it upon the table beside the bed, then tiptoed out of the room, closing the door with great care to make no noise. The house was silent and solidly dark as he went down the broad stairway and opened the front door to let himself out into the faint illumination of the summer night. It was a night profoundly hushed and motionless; and within it, enclosed in heat, the town lay prostrate.

Sighing heavily, the young husband walked to and fro upon the short grass of the lawn, wondering what had "happened" to Lena—as he thought of it—to upset her so; wondering, too, what had happened to himself, that since he had married her she had most of the time seemed to him to be, not the Lena he thought he knew, but an inexplicable stranger. This was a mystery beyond his experience, and he could only sigh and shake his inadequate head; meanwhile pacing beneath the midnight stars. But they were neither puzzled nor surprised, those experienced stars, so delicately bright in the warm sky, for they had looked down upon uncounted other young husbands in his plight and pacing as he did.

By and by he stood still, aware of another presence in the dimness of the neighbouring yard. The only sound in all the world seemed to be a minute tinkling and plashing of water where the stoic swan maintained himself at his duty while other birds slept; but upon the stone rim of the fountain Dan thought he discerned a white figure sitting. He went to the fence between the two lawns to make sure, and found that he was right; a large and graceful woman sat there, leaning over and drawing one hand meditatively to and fro through the water.

"Martha?" he said in a low voice.

She looked up, said "Dan!" under her breath, and came to the fence. "Why, you poor thing! You're still in that heavy long coat!"

"Am I?" he asked vaguely. "I hadn't noticed."

"'Hadn't noticed?' In this weather!"

"It *is* fairly hot," he said, as though this circumstance had just been called to his attention.

"Then why don't you take it off?"

"My coat?" he returned absently. "I don't mind it."

"I do," Martha said. "You don't need to bother about talking to *me* with your coat off, do you? It's only a dozen years or so since we hid our shoes and stockings in the harness closet in your stable and ran off barefoot to go wading in the street after a thunderstorm. Take it off."

"Well——" He complied, explaining, "I just came out to get cool."

"So did I; but I don't believe it can be done, Dan. I believe this is the worst night for sheer hotness we've had in two or three years. I haven't felt it so much since the day I landed in New York from Cherbourg, summer before last. I'll never forget that day!"

"In New York?" he asked, astonished.

"I should say so! I suppose I felt it more because I was just from abroad, but I think people from our part of the country suffer fearfully from the heat in New York, anyhow."

"I believe they do," he said thoughtfully. "And New York people suffer from the heat when they come out here. That must be it."

"Do you think so?" She appeared to be surprised. "I don't see how New York people could mind the heat anywhere else very much after what they get at home."

"Oh, but they do, Martha! They suffer terribly from heat if they come out here, for instance. You see they don't spend the summers in New York. They either go abroad in summer or else to the country."

"Does she?" Martha asked quickly; but corrected herself. "Do they?"

"Yes," he said, seeming to be unaware of the correction. "That's why it upsets her so. You see——"

"Yes?"

"Well——" he said, hesitating. "It—it does kind of upset

her. It——" He paused, then added lamely, "It's just the heat, though. That's all seems to be really the matter; she can't stand the weather."

"She'll get used to it," Martha said gently. "You mustn't worry, Dan."

"Oh, I don't. In a few days she'll probably see how lovely it really is here, and she'll begin to enjoy it and be more like herself. Everything'll be all right in a day or so; I'm sure of that."

"Yes, Dan."

"Of course just now, what with the heat and all and everybody strangers to her, why, it's no wonder it makes her feel a little upset. Anybody *would* be, but in a few days from now"—he hesitated, and concluded, with a somewhat lame insistence, "Well, it'll all be entirely different."

"Yes, Dan," she said again, but there was an almost imperceptible tremble in her voice, and his attention was oddly caught by it.

All his mind had been upon the suffering little bride, but there was something in the quality of this tremulousness in Martha's voice that made him think about Martha, instead. And suddenly he looked at her with the same wonder he had felt earlier this queer evening, when he noticed for the first time that emanation of serenity between his father and mother. For there seemed to be something about Martha, too, that he had known familiarly all his life, but had never thought of before.

There is indeed a light that is light in darkness, and these strange moments of revelation, when they come, are brought most often by the night. Daylight, showing too many things, may afterwards doubt them, but they are real and not to be forgotten. They are only moments; and yet, while this one had its mystic little life, Dan was possessed in part by the feeling, altogether vague, that somewhere a peculiar but indefinable mistake had been made by somebody not identified to him.

Moreover, here was matter more curious still: this thing he had all his life known about Martha, but had never realized until now, made her in a moment a woman new to him, so that she seemed to stand there, facing him across the iron fence, a new Martha. He had no definition in words for what he felt, nor sought one; but it was as if he found himself in possession of an ineffable gift, inexpressibly valuable and shining vaguely in the darkness. This shining, wan and touching, seemed to come from Martha herself; and this newness of hers, that was yet so old, put a glamour about her. The dim, kind face and shimmering familiar figure were beautiful, he saw, never before having had consciousness of her as beautiful; but what most seemed to glow upon him out of the glamour about her was the steadfastness within her; for that was the jewel worn by the very self of her and shining upon him in the night.

"Martha——" he said in a low voice.

"Yes, Dan?"

"You've always been such a friend of mine, I—I—I've never said much about how I feel about it. I haven't got anything I wouldn't sooner part with, Martha."

"I hope so," she said gently, and bowed her head in a kind of meekness. "I hope so, Dan, but——" She stopped.

"But what, Martha?"

"I'm afraid," she said slowly, "your wife isn't going to like me."

"Oh, but she will," he returned, trying to put heartiness into this assurance. "She's bound to! Why, everybody in the world likes you, Martha."

"No; I had the feeling as soon as I spoke to her that she never would, Dan. It was just a feeling, but I'm afraid it'll turn out so. That doesn't mean I won't try my best to make her."

"You won't need to try. Of course just now she's suffering so terribly, poor little thing——"

"Poor Dan!" Martha said, as he stopped speaking and

sighed instead. "You never *could* bear to see anybody suffer. The trouble is it always makes you suffer more than the person that's doing the original suffering."

"Oh, no. But I don't know what on earth to do for her. Of course, in a few days, when she begins to see what it's really *like* here, and I get her to understand a little more about the Addition——"

He stopped, startled to hear his name called in a querulous little voice from an upstairs window.

"She's awake," he said in a whisper.

"Who on earth are you talking with out there?" called the querulous voice.

"Good-night," he whispered, moving away hurriedly; but, looking back, he saw that Martha remained at the separating iron fence, leaning upon it now; and he could feel, rather than see, that she was not looking at him, but that her head was again bowed in the same meekness with which she had said she hoped he prized her feeling for him.

CHAPTER XI

THE doleful bride remained in bed all the next day, prostrate under the continuing heat;—in fact, it was not until a week had passed that she felt herself able to make the excursion projected by the hopeful bridegroom; and when they finally did set forth, in Dan's light runabout, she began to suffer before they reached the gates of the carriage driveway.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "Is it going to be bumpy like this all the way? It hurts my back."

Dan apologized. "I'm sorry I didn't have those holes in the drive filled up. I'll do it myself this evening. But here on the avenue," he said, as they turned north from the gates, "we'll have this fine cedar-block pavement for quite a good way."

"Oh, dear!" she complained. "It's worse on the cedar-block pavement than it was in your driveway."

"It *is* a little teeny bit jolty," Dan admitted. "You see this pavement's been down over five years now, but it's held out mighty well when you consider the traffic that's been over it—mighty well! It's been one of the finest pavements I ever saw in any town."

She gave a little moan. "You talk as if what it *has* been were a great help to us now. It *does* hurt my back, Dan."

"Oh, it isn't goin' to keep on like this," he assured her comfortingly. "The contracts are already signed for a new pavement. Six months from now this'll all be as smooth as a billiard table."

"But we have to go over it to-*day!*"

"That's why I thought the runabout would be pleasanter for you," he said. "Our old family carriage is more comfortable in some ways, but it hasn't got rubber tires. I hardly notice the bumps myself with these tires."

"*I* do!"

"Think what a great invention it is, though," he said cheerfully. "Why, before long I shouldn't wonder if you'd see almost everything that rolls usin' rubber tires, and a good many such light traps as this with inflated ones like bicycles. If horseless carriages ever amount to anything, they'll get to usin' inflated rubber tires, too, most likely."

"Oh, dear me!" Lena sighed. "Doesn't this heat ever relent a *little?*"

He assured her that it did; that the hot spell would soon be over, and that she wouldn't mind it when they reached the Addition, which was on higher ground. "It's always cool out at Ornaby," he said proudly. "The mean level's twenty-eight feet higher than it is in this part of the city; and I never saw the day when you couldn't find a breeze out there."

"Then hurry and get there! It must be a terribly long way. I don't see any higher ground ahead of us—nothing but this eternal flatness and flatness and flatness! I don't see how you people stand it. I should think somebody would *build* a hill!"

He laughed and told her that Ornaby was almost a hill. "Practically, it is," he said. "Anyhow it's a sort of plateau—practically. You see the mean level——"

"Oh, dear!" she sighed; and for a time they jogged on in silence.

He drove with one hand, holding over her with the other a green silk parasol, a performance not lacking in gallantry, nor altogether without difficulty, for his young horse was lively, in spite of the weather; yet it is doubtful if strangers, seeing the runabout pass, would have guessed the occupants a bride and groom.

Beneath the broad white rim of Lena's straw hat the pretty little face was contorted with discontent; while her companion's expression showed a puzzled discouragement not customarily associated with the expressions of bridegrooms. True, the discouragement passed before long, but it came back again after a little more conversation. Then it disappeared again, but returned when signs of capricious weather were seen in the sky. For it is new knowledge to nobody that the

weather has an uneducated humour and will as soon play the baboon with a bride and groom, or with a kind cripple on an errand of mercy, as it will with the hardiest ruffian. But at first Dan welcomed the hints of change in the southwest.

"By George!" he said, nodding across the vast flat cornfields upon their left, for the runabout had now come into the open country. "*There's* good news, Lena."

"What is?"

"Look over yonder. We're goin' to get rain, and Heaven knows we need it! Look."

Along the southwest horizon of cornfields and distant groves they saw a thickening nucleus of dark haze. Out of it, clouds of robust sculpture were slowly rising, muttering faintly as they rose, as if another planet approached and its giants grumbled, being roused from sleep to begin the assault.

"By George, that's great!" Dan exclaimed in high delight. "That's worth millions of dollars to the farmers, Lena."

But Lena was as far as possible from sharing his enthusiasm. "I believe it's going to be a thunderstorm. Turn back. I hate thunderstorms. I'm afraid of them."

"Why, they won't hurt you, Lena."

"They frighten me and they do kill people. Please turn back."

"But we're almost there, dear. I think the rain'll hold off, probably, but if it doesn't we'd be more likely to get wet goin' all the way back home than if we went ahead. I've got a tool shed out there we could wait under."

"A tool shed? With all the tools *in* it? That's just where the lightning would strike first!"

Dan laughed and tried to reassure her, but although they drove on in the bright sunshine for a time, she became more and more nervous. "It almost seems to me you don't *want* to do things I want you to. We should have turned back when I first spoke of it."

"Look, dear," he said. "Just ahead of us there's something you're goin' to be mighty proud of some day. It's Ornaby Addition, Lena!"

Before them the dirt road, grown with long grass between the ruts, had been widened to the dimensions of a city street as it passed between old forest groves of beech and elm, through which other wide rough roads had recently been cut. Beyond the woods were some open fields, where lines of stakes were driven in the ground to outline—apparently in a mood of over-optimistic prophecy—some scores of building lots and various broad avenues. But so far as could be seen from the runabout, felled trees and wooden stakes were all that proved Ornaby to be an Addition and not a farm, though a few negroes were burning the remnants of a rail fence in a field not far from the road. And what made the whole prospect rather desolate was the malicious caprice of the weather;—the very moment when Dan stopped the runabout and waved his hand in a proud semicircle of display, the first of the robust clouds passed over the sun and Ornaby lay threatened in a monstrous shadow.

"Look, Lena!" the exultant proprietor cried. "This is Ornaby!"

"Is it?" she said desolately. "I do wish you'd turned round when I said. It's going to thunder and lighten horribly, and I know I'm going to be frightened to death."

Then, as a louder rumble sounded in the sky, she shivered, clutching Dan's arm. "I *know* that struck somewhere!"

"It might have struck somewhere in the next county," he laughed.

"What! Why, look at the sky right over us. I never saw anything so awful."

Dan laughed again and patted her small, clutching hand soothingly. "It's just a pleasant little summer thundershower, Lena."

"'Little!'" she cried. "Do you call storms like this 'little' out here?"

For, in truth, Dan's reassuring word was not well supported by the aspect of the sky. Above them hung what appeared to be a field of inverted gray haystacks, while from westward ragged, vast draperies advanced through a saffron light that

suddenly lay upon all the land. A snort of wind tore at the road, carrying dust high aloft; then there was a curious silence throughout all the great space of the saffron light, and some large raindrops fell in a casual way, then stopped.

"You see?" said the cheery Dan. "That's all we'll get, likely enough. I shouldn't be surprised it'd clear up now."

"'Clear up!'" Lena cried incredulously. "I do believe you're crazy! Oh, *heavens!*"

And the heavens she thus adjured appeared heartily inclined to warrant her outcry. Satan fell from the sky in a demoniac swoop of lightning, carrying darkness with him; wind and water struck the runabout together; and Dan was fain to drive into the woods beside the road, while Lena clung to him and wailed. He tied the trembling horse to a tree, and got the bride and her wrecked parasol under the inadequate shelter of the tool house he had mentioned, but found little happiness there. A hinge had broken; the negroes had carried the door away to repair it; the roof leaked everywhere and was sonorous with the hail that fell presently with the heavy rain. At every bedazzlement of the lightning Lena gasped, then shrieked throughout the ensuing uproar, and before long whimpered that she was freezing. In fact, her wet clothes, little more than gauze, appeared to be dissolving upon her, while the air grew cold with the hail.

Dan put his soggy coat about her, petted her, and piled wet sticks together, saying that he would make a fire for her if he could. Whereupon she wept and uttered a pathetic laughter. "Burn up with the heat one minute," she said, through chattering teeth, "and the next freeze to death if you can't make a fire! What a place!"

Of course Dan defended his climate, but his argument was of as little avail as were his attempts to build a fire with sodden wood and drenched matches. Lena suffered from the cold as expressively as she had from the heat, and forgetting that these changes in temperature had not been unknown to her in her own native habitat and elsewhere, she convinced herself perfectly that all of her troubles were put upon her by

"the West." Yet in this she was not so unreasonable as might appear;—our sufferings from interior disturbances are adept in disguising themselves as inflictions from outside.

These troubles of hers were not alleviated by two unfortunate remarks made by her young husband in the course of his efforts to hearten her. After one of the numerous electrical outrages, appalling in brilliancy and uproar, he said he was sorry he couldn't have taken her to the old Ornaby farmhouse for shelter; and when Lena reproached him for not having thought of this sooner, he explained too hastily that the house had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground during a thunderstorm earlier in the summer. After that, as she became almost hysterical, he straightway went on to his second blunder. "But nobody was hurt," he said. "Nobody at all, Lena. There wasn't anybody in the house; and anyhow I don't believe the lightning's really struck right near us during this whole shower. Why, it's nothin' at all; I've seen storms a thousand times worse than this. Only last summer I got caught out on a little lake, north of here, in a canoe, and pretty near a real tornado came up, with thunder and lightning that would make this little racket to-day look like something you'd get from a baby's toy. We didn't mind it; we just——"

"'We?' Who?"

"Martha Shelby was with me," the incautious Dan replied. "Why, you ought to've seen how she behaved, Lena! *She* didn't mind it; she just laughed and kept on paddlin' like a soldier. I honestly think she enjoyed it. Now, why can't you——"

"You hush!" Lena cried.

"But I only——"

"Haven't I enough to bear? Be quiet!"

He obeyed, gazing out upon the tumultuous landscape, and wondering sadly what made her so angry with him. Then, all at once, beyond and through the mazes of tossing rain he seemed to see, however vaguely, the new Martha he had recognized in that queer night after his homecoming;

and the recollection of their strange moment together brought him another not unlike it now. Something mystic operated here; he felt again that same enrichment, charged with an indefinite regret; and though the moment was no more than a moment, passing quickly, it comforted him a little. "There! Don't worry!" Martha seemed to say to him gently. So he said it to himself and felt in better spirits.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" Lena wept, huddling in a corner of the shed. "How this horrible old world *does* make us pay for not knowing what to do!" And when he turned to try again to soothe her, she shrank but farther away from him and bade him let her alone.

"But it'll be all cleared up, half an hour from now," he said. "You'll be warm as toast as soon as the sun comes out again, and then we'll go over the whole Addition and see what's what, Lena!"

The first half of this prediction was amply fulfilled; Lena was indeed warm soon after the sun reappeared; but they did not inspect the Addition further. They went home, and a few days later Lena wrote an account of the expedition in a letter to her brother George. Not altogether happy when she wrote, she was unable to refrain from a little natural exaggeration.

You said to me once you'd like to come here to live. Read Martin Chuzzlewit again before you do. "*Eden!*" That's what the famous Ornaby Addition looks like! It isn't swampy, but that's all the difference I could see. We drove miles in the heat and choking dust and there wasn't anything to see when we got there! Just absolutely nothing! People had been digging around in spots and cutting a lot of trees down and after a cyclone and cloudburst that came up while we were there he pointed out a post sticking out of the ground and showed the greatest pride because it had "47th St." painted on it! This was when we were driving out of the woods. He wanted to poke all over the dreary place, looking at other posts and stumps of trees, but I couldn't stand any more of it.

We had the most horrible storm I was ever out in, and it hailed so that after being ill in bed for a week with the ghastly heat, it got so cold I almost died, and then as soon as the cyclone was over it got

hot again—it isn't like ordinary heat; it gets hot with a sticky heaviness I can't express and the thermometer must stay up over 100 even at night—and as soon as we got home I had to go to bed where I've been ever since—hence this pencil—and I've just escaped pneumonia! And during the cyclone when I was really ill with the nervous anguish lightning always causes me, he began telling me how wonderfully a former sweetheart of his behaved in a storm on a lake! It was his idea of how to make me not mind it. Of course he only meant to cheer me up—but *really!*

His father and mother aren't bad, I must say. They're quite like him, good-looking and full of kindness; his mother is really sweet and I like them both, though I'll *never* get used to hearing people talk with this terrible Western accent. To a sensitive ear, it's actual pain. The brother looks rather like Dan, too; but he's pompous in a dry way and affected. Reads heavy things and seems to me a cold-hearted sort of prig, though he's always polite. The father and mother read, too. Their idea is Carlyle and Emerson and Thoreau—*you* know the type of mind—and Harlan (the brother) talks about that Englishman, Shaw, who writes the queer plays. They say they have two theatres open in winter, but of course there's no music here except something they brag about called the "April Festival," when there's a week of imported orchestra and some singing. Pleasant for *me!*—one week in the year!—though I suppose *you'll* think it's all I should have.

They meant to be kind, but they gave me the most fearful "reception." I never endured such a ghastly ordeal. The weather was over 100 in the shade—and in crowded rooms, well, imagine it! The people were dressed well enough—some of them were rather queer, but so are some at home—but I wish you could have seen the vehicles they drive in and their coachmen! Slouchy darkies in old straw hats with long-tailed horses that get the reins under their tails—and fringed surreys and family carryalls, something like what you'd see in the country towns in Connecticut. They have phaetons and runabouts and a few respectable traps, but I've seen just one good-looking Victoria since I came here. They don't *like* smartness really. I believe they think it's effeminate!

The real head of the Oliphant family is an outrageous old hag, Dan's grandmother, who behaved terribly to me at my only meeting with her—it will remain our only meeting! They're all afraid of her, and she has a lot of money. Queer—I understand he's tried to raise

money for his Eden all over the town, but never asked the terrible grandmother. She doesn't believe in it, and I must say she's right about *that!* Rather!

How strange that any girl should do what I've done—and with my eyes wide open! I did it, and yet I knew he didn't understand me. I ought to have known that he can *never* understand me, that we don't speak the same language and never will. I ought to have realized what it means to know that I must live days, weeks, months, *years* with a person who will never understand anything whatever of my real self!

Yet I still care for him, and he is good. He does a thousand little kind things for me that do not help me at all, and the truth is most of them only irritate me. How odd it is that I write to you about not being understood—you who are seldom kind to me and often most unjust! Yet in a way I have always felt that you do understand me a little—perhaps unsympathetically—but at least you give me the luxury of being *partly* understood.

Yes, I still care for him, but when I think of his awful Ornaby thing I sometimes believe I have married a madman. It is nothing, *as I said*—hopeless—a devastated farm—and yet when he speaks of it his eye lights up and he begins to walk about and gesture and talk as if he actually saw houses and streets—and shops—and thousands of people living there! If this isn't hallucination, I don't know what hallucination means.

But since our excursion to the place I've almost cured him of talking about it to *me!* I just can't *stand* it! And what is pleasant, I think he probably goes to talk about it to another woman. Already! A perfectly enormous girl seven or eight feet tall that he'd picked out to be my most intimate friend! Because she's been *his* most intimate friend, of course. But I suppose all men are like *that.*

The heat did relax for a day or two—but it's back again. Sometimes I can't believe I am actually in this place—apparently for life—and I begin to hope that I'll wake up. I think even you would pity me sometimes, George.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE minds of Mrs. Savage's neighbours across the street and of the habitual passers-by, that broad plate-glass window where it was her custom to sit for the last hour of every afternoon had come to bear the significance of a glass over a portrait. All long thoroughfares and many of even the shortest have such windows; and the people who repeatedly pass that way will often find the portrait window becoming a part, however slight, of their own lives; but it will seldom be an enduring part, except as a fugitive, pathetic memory. For a time the silent old face is seen framed there every day, or it may be a pale and wistful child looking out gravely upon the noisy world. Then abruptly one day the window is only a window and no more a portrait; the passer-by has a moment of wonder whenever he goes by, but presently may have his faintly troubled question answered by a wreath on the door; and afterwards the window that was once a portrait will seem to him a little haunted.

Mrs. Savage's window had been a portrait so long that even the school children who went homeward that way in the autumn afternoons noticed a vacancy behind the glass and missed her from the frame; but new seasons came and passed, and no wreath appeared upon her door. She had been so thoroughly alive for so many years that the separation of herself from life could not be abrupt, even if she wished it. She did not wish it she told Harlan, one rainy night, as he sat beside her bed after bringing her the news that she was a great-grandmother.

"I suppose it seems funny to you," she said. "You must wonder why an old woman with nothing to live for would still want to live. I suppose you think it's because I just want to eat a little more and to lie here listening to that!" With a

hand now become the very ghost of a hand, she gestured toward a window where the parted curtains revealed black panes slushed with noisy water by the strong west wind. "How you must wonder!"

"Oh, no," Harlan said, though she spoke the truth. "I don't wonder at all, grandma."

"Yes, you do! How could a young person help wondering about such a thing? Year before last I could still go out for a little walk; last year I could only go for a drive in the afternoons. After that I could still get downstairs and sit by the window; then I couldn't even do that, and could only hobble around upstairs;—then I couldn't even get into another room without being helped. And now for a month I've not been able to get out of bed—and I'll never be able to. No wonder you wonder I want to hang on!"

"But I don't," he insisted. "I don't, indeed."

"You do. What do you think I have to live for?"

"Why, partly for your family, grandma. We're all devoted to you; and besides you have your memories—I know you have many happy memories."

She laughed feebly, but nevertheless with audible asperity, interrupting his rather stumbling reassurances. "'Happy memories!' Young people are always talking about 'happy memories'; and they think old people 'live in their happy memories.' I advise you not to look forward to spending your old age in that way! There's no such thing, young man."

"No such thing as a happy memory?"

"Not when you're as old as I am," she said. "You can only have a happy memory of something when you can look forward to something of the same kind happening again; but I can't look forward to anything. Yet I still want to hang on!"

Harlan laughed gently. "Then doesn't that prove you do look forward to something, grandma?"

"No," she said. "It only proves I still have a little curiosity. I'd like to live twenty years just to prove I'm right about how this baby's going to turn out."

The implication of her tone was grim with conviction—clearly she spoke of a baby who could not turn out well—and Harlan was amused by his own perception of a little drama: his grandmother, clinging with difficulty to one extreme edge of life and prophesying only black doom for this new person who had just crawled up into life over the opposite extreme edge. "I'm sorry you feel so gloomy about that baby, grandma. I'm rather pleased, myself, to be an uncle, and so far I haven't been worrying about his future. Don't you think there's a chance for him?"

"Not with such a mother and father," the old lady promptly replied. "Dan oughtn't to have mixed with such a stock as that painted-up little photograph girl."

Harlan protested a little; coming to Lena's defence at least in this detail. "But I understand that the particular foible of the McMillan family is the magnificence of their stock, as you call it, grandma. It seems they're so proud of it they don't think of much else."

"Yes; that's always a sign a stock's petered out. When people *put* a lot on what their folks used to do, it always means they haven't got gimp enough left to do anything themselves. The minute I laid eyes on her picture I knew she came from a no-account stock; and when your mother gave her that reception everybody in town could tell right off what she was. Painted! *That* tells the story!"

Again Harlan protested on behalf of his sister-in-law. "Oh, I shouldn't make too much of that, grandma. A little rouge now and then——"

"'A little rouge!'" the old lady echoed satirically. "She was plastered with it! That doesn't make any difference though, because a woman that uses it at all is a bad woman and wants the men to know it."

"Oh, no, no!"

"It's so," the old lady cried as fiercely as her enfeebled voice permitted. "It's the truth, and you'll live to see I'm right. I don't want you to forget then that I told you so. You remember it, Harlan."

"Yes, grandma," he said placatively. "I will if——"

"I don't want any 'if' about it. You remember what I'm telling you! She's bad!" Mrs. Savage spoke so vehemently that she had to pause and let her quickened breathing become more regular;—then she went on: "Look how she's treated me. If she'd had the right stuff in her, she'd been have grateful to me for giving her a lesson. If she'd been just a foolish girl who'd made a mistake and painted herself because she wanted to look healthier when she met her new husband's friends, why, she might have got a little pettish with me for showing her it was a mistake the way I did, but long before now she'd have forgiven me and thanked me for doing it. Not she! That was the last time I set foot out of doors; and has she ever come to see me? She's never been near me! What's more, she's done her best to keep Dan from ever coming here. When he *has* come I know he hasn't dared to tell her. Do you deny it?"

Harlan shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I can't, grandma."

"Do you know why she hates me so?" the old lady demanded. "It's because she's bad, and she knows I know it. People never forgive you for knowing they're bad. And now she's brought this baby into the world to inherit her badness, and you sit there and wonder I say the child's bound to turn out wrong."

"Grandma!" the young man exclaimed, laughing. "I only wonder you don't take into account the fact that the baby is Dan's, too. Dan may be a rather foolish sort of person—in fact, I think he is—but surely you've never thought him bad."

The old lady looked at her grandson querulously. "Don't be so superior, young man. That's always been your trouble—you think you're the only perfect person in the world." And when he would have protested, defending himself, she checked him sharply and went on: "Never mind! I'm talking about other things now. The trouble with Dan is that he's never seen anything as it really is and never will—not in all the days of his life! He was that way even when he was a boy. I remember once you hurt his feelings about some poor little brackets he was making with a little Jew boy. He thought the

brackets were perfect, and he thought the little Jew boy was perfect, too. When you criticized them both he got into such a spasm of crying he had to go home to bed."

"Yes," Harlan said, smiling faintly; "I remember. He was always like that."

"Yes, and always will be. So he'll think this child of his is perfect, and it'll never get any discipline. I'd like to live twenty years just to see the wrack and ruin that's going to be made by these children born nowadays. Their parents got hardly any discipline at all, and *they* won't get *any*, so they'll never know how to respect anything at all. It only takes a little common sense to see from the start how this child'll turn out. With no discipline or respect for anything, and with such a mother from a petered-out stock, and a father that hasn't got a practical thought in his head, you can just as well as not expect the child to be in the penitentiary by the time he's twenty years old!" Then, as Harlan laughed, the old lady uttered a faint sound of laughter herself, not as if admitting that she exaggerated anything, however, but grimly. "You'll see!"

"You're right about it this far," Harlan said. "Dan already thinks the baby's perfect."

"Happy, is he?"

"The usual triumphant young father. More triumphant than the usual one, I should say. He went whooping over the house till mother had to stop him and send him outdoors to keep him from disturbing Lena."

"Yes; that's like him," the old lady said. "How queer it is; there are people who can always find something to whoop about, no matter what happens. Your grandfather was like that when he was a young man. Even when we were poor as Job's turkey he'd burst out cackling and laughing over anything at all. I used to just look at him and wonder. Dan's desperate for money, isn't he?"

Harlan coughed, frowned, and then looked faintly amused. "Yes, I should just about use the word 'desperate.' I think he is."

"He'll not get any of mine!" Mrs. Savage said. "I'd not be very apt to help him anyhow, after the way his wife's treated me. He wouldn't listen to me; he *would* marry her, and he *would* throw all he had away on that miserable old farm! Now I guess he's got nothing more to throw away."

"He's got rather less than nothing now, grandma. The place wouldn't sell for enough to pay the mortgages, and he hasn't been able to meet the interest. Father managed to let him have a thousand dollars two months ago, but it didn't go very far. The truth is, I think Dan's begun to be a little out of his head over the thing;—he had twenty teams hauling dirt while poor father's thousand lasted. Now he's going to lose the place, and I'd think it a fortunate misfortune if I believed he'd learn anything by it; but he won't."

"No," Mrs. Savage agreed gloomily. "He's like his grandfather, but he hasn't got a wife to watch over him as his grandfather had. He'll just be up to some new wastefulness."

"He already is," Harlan laughed. "You're extraordinary, the way you put your finger on things, grandma. He's already up to a new wastefulness."

"What is it?"

"Horseless carriages," Harlan informed her. "Automobiles;—'*les autos*,' I believe the French call them now. Since old Shelby wouldn't run a car line out to the farm, and the city council wouldn't build a street to the city boundary, and the county wouldn't improve the road, Dan's got the really magnificent idea that his Ornaby place could be reached by automobiles. I pointed out to him that Mr. Eugene Morgan charges five thousand dollars apiece for the machines he's making; but Dan says he doesn't mean that kind. He believes if the things could be made cheap enough everybody that's going to live in Ornaby Addition could own one and go back and forth in it. And besides, he expects to build some horseless omnibuses to run out there from town."

"He expects to?" Mrs. Savage cried, aghast. "He's just about to lose everything, yet he expects to manufacture horseless carriages and omnibuses?"

"Oh, yes." Harlan said easily. "*He* doesn't know he's bankrupt! To hear him you'd think he's just beginning to make his fortune and create great public works."

"Jehoshaphat!" In a few extremities during her long life Mrs. Savage had sought an outlet for her emotions in this expression; and after using it now she lay silent for some moments; then gave utterance to a dry little gasp of laughter. "I guess it's a good thing I've made a new will! Maybe this girl might have sense enough to clear out."

"Lena?" Harlan asked, for his grandmother's voice was little more than a whisper, as if she spoke to herself; and he was not sure of her words. "Do you mean you think Lena might leave Dan?"

"If he didn't have any money she might. What did she marry him for? She's *hated* being married to him, hasn't she? She must have believed he had money."

Harlan shook his head. "No," he said thoughtfully;—"I don't believe she's mercenary. I don't think that's why she married him."

"Can't you use your reason?" the old lady complained petulantly. "Hasn't she whined and scolded every minute since he brought her here?"

"Oh, it's not so bad as that, grandma."

"Your mother says she stays in her room for days at a time."

"Yes, she gets spells when she's moody—or at least just quiet," Harlan admitted. "But she's not always in them by any means. She's rather amusing sometimes, and she seems to try to be kind to Dan."

"Oh, she 'seems to try?'" Mrs. Savage echoed. "*You* seem to try to stand up for her! Do you like her?"

Faced with this abrupt question, Harlan was somewhat disturbed. "Well, possibly not," he replied honestly, after a moment. "No, I can't say I do."

"I thought not. And does she like any of you?"

"Well, she's evidently rather fond of mother—and of father, too."

"Who on earth could help liking *them?*" Mrs. Savage cried, and, in her vehemence, seemed about to rise from her bed. "Do you think *that's* to her credit? She hates everybody and everything *else* here, and she nags Dan. That means she thought he had money, and she married him for it, and now she's disappointed. Well, she'll keep on being disappointed a good while, so far as *my* property is concerned! Then maybe she'll have sense enough to leave him and give him a chance to get the woman he ought to 've married in the first place."

Harlan looked a little startled as his grandmother sank back, panting with exhaustion; the spirit within her was too high and still too passionate for the frail material left to it. The self of her was indeed without age, unaltered, and as dominant as it had ever been, though the instrument through which it communicated, her strengthless body, was almost perished out of any serviceableness. To her grandson there came an odd comparison: it seemed to him that she was like a vigorous person shouting through an almost useless telephone that could make only the tiniest, just perceptible sounds; and he had an odder thought than this: When the telephone was entirely broken and silent, would she still be trying to shout through it? She would be shouting somewhere, he felt sure. But what he said, rather sadly, was, "Martha? I suppose you mean Martha Shelby?"

"Of course! Martha could make something out of Dan, and she's never looked at anybody but him, and she never will. You needn't expect her to, either, young man."

Harlan's colour heightened at this, and some shadows of sensitiveness about his mouth became quickly more visible. "Oh, no; of course I don't," he said quietly.

"She'll never marry you," the terrible old lady went on. "I know what you've been up to!—I've had my eyes about me—but you'll never get her to quit thinking of Dan. And if this painted-up photograph girl takes her baby and goes away some day, things might have a chance to come out right. But *you*, young man——" She stopped, beset by a little cough as feeble as a baby's, yet enough to check her;

and upon this the professional nurse who now took care of her appeared in the doorway and gave Harlan the smiling glance that let him know his call had lasted long enough.

He rose from his chair by the bedside, murmuring the appropriate cheering phrases;—he was sure his grandmother would be stronger the next time he came, and she would soon "get downstairs again," he said; while she looked up at him with a strange contemplation that he sometimes remembered afterwards; she had so many times in her life said to others what he was saying to her now. But she let him thus ease his departure, and responded with only a faintly gasped, "We'll hope so," and "Good-night."

Though he bent over her, her voice was almost inaudible against the sound of the rain spitefully hammering the windows; and in the light of the single green-shaded bulb that hung above the table of tonics and medicines at the foot of the bed, the whiteness of her face was almost indistinguishable from the whiteness of the pillow. She was so nearly a ghost, indeed, that as he touched the cold hand in farewell, it seemed to him that if there were ghosts about—his grandfather, for instance—she might almost as easily be communing with them as with the living. She was of their world more than of this wherein she still wished to linger.

Downstairs, the elderly negro who had served her so long waited to open the door for the parting guest.

"You ought to brung you' papa's an' mamma's carri'ge, Mist' Hollun," he said. "You goin' git mighty wet, umbrella or no umbrella."

"No doubt, Nimbus."

"Yes, suh," said Nimbus reflectively. "You goin' swim. How you think you' grammaw feel to-night?"

"I'm afraid she's not any stronger. I'm afraid she won't be here much longer."

"No, suh?" The thin old man chuckled a little, as if to himself. "She awready *did* be here some few days! She stay li'l' while yet, Mist' Hollun."

"You think so?"

"Yes, suh," said Nimbus, chuckling again. "Same way as 'tis 'bout anything else. Some people come call on you; stay li'l' while; git up to go, they walk right out. Some people, they set an' set an' set; then when they git up to go, they don't go; they keep on talk, talk, talk. You grammaw she aw-ways do like that. She goin' take her time before she walk out the big door."

"I hope so," Harlan said, as Nimbus unfastened the old-fashioned brass door-chain for him. "I hope so, indeed."

"Yes, suh; she take her own time," the coloured man insisted;—then, opening the door, he stood aside and inclined himself in a bow that obviously gave him a satisfaction more than worth the effort. "I expeck she do you well, Mist' Hollun."

"What?" Harlan asked, pausing to unfurl the umbrella he had left just outside. "What did you say, Nimbus?"

"I mean: What she goin' do with all that propaty?" Nimbus explained. "Door she goin' out of when she git ready, it's a mighty big door, but 'tain't big enough to tote all that propaty with her—no, suh! I expeck you goin' git mighty big slice all that propaty, Mist' Hollun. Goo'-ni', suh."

Harlan laughed, bade him good-night, and strode forward into the gusty water that drove through the darkness. Outside the gate, as he turned toward home, he laughed again, amused by the old negro's view of things, but not amused by the things themselves. Harlan knew that he had never won his grandmother's affection; her thought had always been of his brother and was still of Dan now, as she lay upon the bed from which she would never rise. Whatever the terms of her new will might be, and whatever their actual consequences, she had made it clear that they were at least designed for Dan's ultimate benefit.

Harlan had little expectation of any immediate benefit to himself, notwithstanding the lively hints of Nimbus; nor were his hopes greater than his expectations. He had no wish to supplant his brother.

CHAPTER XIII

HE HAD no wish to supplant his brother in Mrs. Savage's will or in anything;—last of all did he wish to supplant him in the heart of Martha Shelby. Mrs. Savage had been far from understanding her grandson's deep pride, and, as he strode homeward in the slashing rain, her acrid warnings that he must not hope for anything from Martha repeated themselves over and over in his mind, as such things will, and upon each repetition stung the more.

He thought ruefully of the ancient popular notion that such stingings come from only the unpleasant truth. "It hurts him because it's true," people say, sometimes, as if mere insult must ever fail to rankle, and all accusation not well-founded fall but painlessly upon the righteous. What Harlan recognized as possibly nearest the truth among his grandmother's unfavourable implications was what hurt him the least. He did not wholly lack the power of self-criticism; and he was able to perceive that the old lady had at least a foundation when she said, "Don't be so superior, young man. That's always been your trouble." Harlan was ready to admit that superiority had always been his trouble.

Not definitely, or in so many words, but nevertheless in fact, he believed himself superior to other people—even to all other people. Thus, when he and his brother were children, and their father took them to Mr. Forepaugh's circus, Dan was enthusiastic about a giant seven and a half feet high; but Harlan remained cold in the lofty presence. True giants were never less than nine feet tall and this one was "a pretty poor specimen," he declared, becoming so superior in the matter that Dan fell back upon personalities. "Well, anyhow, he's taller than *you* are, Harlan."

"I'm not in the business of being a giant, thank you,"

Harlan said; and Dan, helplessly baffled by the retort, because he was unable to analyse it, missed the chance to understand a fundamental part of his brother's character.

Harlan did not go into the giant business, yet he grew up looking down on all giants, since they all failed to reach the somewhat arbitrary nine feet he had set for them. He could not give credit to a struggling giant of seven feet and a half, and admire him for the difficulties overcome in getting to be at least that tall; Harlan really looked down upon such a giant from a height of nine feet.

Yet he was able, at times, to perceive his superiority as an unendearing characteristic and even to look upon it with some philosophic detachment; he did not resent his grandmother's remarks upon that subject. What he minded was her assumption that he was trying to take Dan's place in Martha Shelby's heart; Harlan wanted his own place there, or none.

He had wanted it ever since Martha was a handsome romping girl of fourteen and he a fastidious observer a little older. She was a romp, yet her boyish romping never lacked a laughing charm; for, although she was one of those big young girls who seem to grow almost overwhelmingly, she had the fortunate gift of gracefulness; she was somehow able to be large without ever being heavy. And one evening at a "German" for young people of the age that begins to be fretful about a correct definition of the word "children," she danced lightly to Harlan and unexpectedly "favoured" him; whereupon something profound straightway happened to the boy's emotions.

No visible manifestations betrayed the change within so self-contained a youth; for here his pride, deep-set even then, was touched;—the lively Martha's too obvious preference was always for the brother so much more of her own sort. Dan was her fellow-romp, and she would come shouting under the Oliphants' windows for him as if she were a boy. They were an effervescent pair, and often rough in their horseplay with each other; while Harlan, aloof and cold of eye, would watch them with an inward protest so sharp that it made him ache.

He wanted to make Martha over from a model of his own devising; he wished her to be more dignified, and could not understand her childish love of what to him seemed mere senseless caperings with the boisterous Dan. Yet neither her caperings nor her devotion to Dan was able to disperse Harlan's feeling for her, which gradually became a kind of customary faint pain. In a little time—a year or two —the caperings ceased; Martha went eastward, as did the brothers, for the acquisition of a polish believed to be richer in that direction; and when she returned she had become dignified, as Harlan wished, but otherwise did not appear to be greatly altered. Certainly her devotion to Dan was the same; and her merely becoming dignified failed to alleviate that customary faint pain of Harlan's. He still had it, and with it his long mystification;—he had never been able to understand why she cared for Dan.

Harlan's view of his brother as a rather foolish person might have meant no more than superiority's tolerant amusement, had that pain and mystification of his not been involved; but, as matters were, Harlan would have been superior indeed if all bitterness had passed him by. He could have submitted, though with a sorrowing perplexity, to Martha's inability to be in love with him; but what sometimes drove him to utter a burst of stung laughter was the thought that she had given her heart to a man who did not even perceive the gift. To Harlan that seemed to be the supreme foolishness of his foolish brother.

Through the rain, as he opened his own gate, he saw in the direction of the house next door a line of faintly glowing oblongs, swept across by wet black silhouettes of tossing foliage; and since these lighted windows at Martha's were all downstairs, he concluded that she must have callers; for when she was alone she went up to her own room to read, and just before nine o'clock Mr. Shelby put out all the lights of the lower floor. The old gentleman was sensitive about uselessly high gas bills, in spite of the fact that he was, himself, to an almost exclusive extent, the company that produced the gas.

In the vestibule at his own door Harlan furled his umbrella, shook the spray from his waterproof overcoat, and was groping in his waistcoat pocket for the latchkey, when his mother unexpectedly opened the door for him from the inside. "I was standing at a window looking out, and saw you come up the walk," she explained. "Your mackintosh looks soaking wet; you must be drowned! The doctor was here again awhile ago and says Lena's doing splendidly, and the nurse just told me she and the baby are both asleep. Come into the library and dry off. Your father's gone to bed, but he lit the fire for you before he went up. We were afraid you'd be chilled. How did you find mother?"

"About the same, I should say." Harlan hung his dripping overcoat upon the ponderous walnut hatrack, the base of which was equipped for such emergencies with a pair of iron soup plates in a high state of ornamentation. Then he followed his mother into the library and went to sit by the fire, extending his long legs to its warmth, so that presently the drenched light shoes he wore began to emit a perceptible vapour.

"You ought to have worn your rubbers," Mrs. Oliphant said reproachfully; and then as he only murmured "Oh, no," in response, she said in a tone of inquiry: "I suppose you didn't happen to see anything of Dan?"

"Not very likely! Not much to be seen between here and grandma's just now except night and water."

"I suppose so," she assented. "I thought possibly you might have gone somewhere else after you left mother's."

"No." But there had been something a little perturbed in her voice and he turned to look at her. "Were you at the window on Dan's account, mother? Are you anxious about him?"

"Not exactly anxious," she answered. "But—well, I just thought——" She paused.

Harlan laughed. "Don't be worried about it. I'll sit up for him, if you like. I dare say your surmise is correct."

"My surmise?" she repeated, a little embarrassed. "What surmise?"

"About how your wandering boy has spent his evening,"

Harlan returned lightly. "I haven't a doubt you're right, and he's followed the good old custom."

Mrs. Oliphant coloured a little. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do!"

"I don't," she protested, with a consciousness of manner that betrayed how well she understood him in spite of her denial. "I don't, indeed!"

"No?" the amused Harlan said mockingly. "You don't know that upon the birth of an heir—especially when it's the first and a boy—it's always understood by every good citizen of these parts that it's the proud father's business to go out and celebrate? Don't worry, mother: Dan won't go so far with it that he'll be unable to get home. Even in his liveliest times at college he always kept his head."

"I'm not exactly worried," she explained, with a troubled air. "I know young fathers usually *do* cut up a little like that; —the only time in his life when your father didn't seem to be quite himself was the night after Dan was born. I'm afraid he was really almost a little tight, and I gave him such a talking to when I was well enough, that he didn't repeat it when you came along. But I haven't been worrying so much about Dan's going downtown and celebrating a little, as you call it —he's so steady nowadays, and works so hard, I don't think it would be much harm—but I thought—I was a little afraid —I——"

"Afraid of what, mother?"

"Well, he was so exhilarated, so excited about his having a son—he was so much that way before he went out, I was a little afraid that when he added stimulants to the tremendous spirits he was already in, he might do something foolish."

"Why, of course he will," Harlan assured her cheerfully. "But it will only amount to some uproariousness and singing at the club, probably."

"I know," she said. "But I've been afraid he'd do something that would put him in a foolish position."

"I shouldn't have that on my mind if I were you, mother.

There's hardly ever anybody at the club in the evening, and the one or two who'd be there on a night like this certainly wouldn't be critical! Besides, they'd *expect* a little boisterousness from him, under the circumstances."

"I know—I know," she said, but neither her tone nor her expression denoted that his reassurances completely soothed her. On the contrary, her anxiety seemed to increase;—she had remained near the open door leading into the hall, and her attitude was that of one who uneasily awaits an event.

"Mother, why don't you go to bed? I'll see that he gets in all right and I won't let him go near Lena's room, if that's what's bothering you."

"It isn't," she returned; was silent a moment; then she said abruptly: "Harlan, would you mind going over to Martha's?"

"What?"

"Would you mind going over there? You could make up some excuse; you could say you wanted to borrow a book or something."

"Why, it's after half-past ten," Harlan said, astonished. "What on earth do you want me to go over there for, as late as this?"

"Well, it's why I am a little worried," she explained. "I'd been standing at the window a long while before you came, Harlan; and about half an hour ago I thought I saw Dan and someone else come along the sidewalk and stop at our gate. At any rate two men did stop at the gate."

"You recognized Dan?"

"No; it was too dark and raining too hard. I thought at first perhaps it was you with someone you knew and had happened to walk along with. I went to the front door and opened it, but I could only make out that they seemed to be talking and gesturing a good deal, and I thought I recognized your cousin Fred Oliphant's voice. I waited, with the door open, but they didn't come in, and pretty soon they went on. I called, 'Dan! Oh, Dan!' but the wind was blowing so I don't suppose they heard me. Then I thought I saw the same

two going up the Shelbys' walk to the front veranda. They must have gone in, because a minute or so afterwards the downstairs windows over there were lighted up. Couldn't you make some excuse to go over and see if it's Dan?"

Harlan jumped up from his chair by the fire. "It just *might* be Dan," he said, frowning. "I don't think so, but——"

"I'm *so* afraid it is!" Mrs. Oliphant exclaimed. "I don't like to bother you, and it may be a little awkward for you, going in so late, but you can surely think of some reasonable excuse, if it *isn't* Dan. If it is, do get him away as quickly as you can; I'd be terribly upset to have him make an exhibition of himself before Martha—she's always had such a high opinion of him."

"Yes, she has!" Harlan interrupted dryly, as he strode out into the hall; and he added: "I don't suppose Lena'd be *too* pleased!"

"She'd be furious," his mother lamented in a whisper. She helped him to put on his wet waterproof coat, and continued her whisper. "She's never been able to like poor Martha, and if she heard he went there to-night when she's still so sick, she—she——"

"Yes, she would!" Harlan said grimly, finishing the thought for her. "You might as well go to bed now, mother."

"No, no," she said. "If it is Dan, I won't let him see me when you get back, but I just want to know he's safely in. And try to—try to——"

"Try to what, mother?" he asked, pausing with the door open.

"Try to explain it a little to Martha. She's always been such a good friend of his, and he needs friends. Try to keep her from losing her high opinion of him. She's always——"

"She has indeed!" Harlan returned with a wry smile. "I'll do what I can." And he closed the door behind him as gently as he could, against the turbulent wind.

CHAPTER XIV

ADMITTED by a coloured housemaid who drowsily said, "Yes'm, she still up," in response to his inquiry, Harlan had only to step into the Shelbys' marble-floored "front hall" to dispel his slight doubts concerning the identity of Martha's callers; his brother was unquestionably one of them.

The heavy doors leading from the hall into the drawing-room sheltering Mr. Shelby's Corot were closed, but Dan's voice was audible and although his words were indistinguishable he was evidently in high spirits and holding forth upon some subject that required a great deal of emphatic expounding. Harlan stepped forward to open the doors and go in but halted abruptly, for at this moment Martha made her appearance at the other end of the hall. She came from the rear of the house and carried an oval silver tray whereon gleamed, among delicate napery and china, a silver coffee pot of unusually ample dimensions.

Her serious but untroubled look was upon the tray; then she glanced up, saw Harlan, and in surprise uttered a vague sound of exclamation. He went quickly toward her, but before he reached her she nodded to the housemaid in dismissal. "You can go to bed now, Emma."

"Yes'm, thank you," said Emma. "I'm full ready," she added, as she disappeared.

"I came over because I was afraid you——" Harlan began.

But Martha interrupted him at once. "You needn't be," she said. "There's nothing the matter."

"I only thought their coming here—disturbing you at this hour——"

"It doesn't disturb me," she said. "It isn't very late."

"But wouldn't your father——"

At that Martha laughed. "The chandelier in there fell down one night last winter, and *it* didn't wake him up! At least I do run the house when he's asleep. Don't look so tragic!"

"But I'm afraid they——"

"It's nothing at all, Harlan. I'd gone upstairs, but not to bed, when the bell rang; and when Emma told me Dan and Fred Oliphant were here, I came down and brought them in and lit the fire for them. They *were* rather damp!"

"But why didn't you——"

"Send them home? Because Dan wanted to tell me all about the baby."

"Good heavens!"

"Not at all!" she said; and as his expression still remained gloomy, she laughed. "Won't you open the door for me? I made coffee for them because I thought it might do them good—especially your cousin Fred."

Harlan uttered an exclamation of reproach addressed to himself: "Idiot! To let you stand there holding that heavy tray!" He would have taken it from her, but she objected.

"No; you might spill something. Just open the door for me."

He obeyed, then followed her into the drawing-room and closed the door. Before him, in a damask-covered armchair, was seated his second cousin, Mr. Frederic Oliphant, a young gentleman of considerable pretensions to elegance, especially when he had spent an evening at the club. In fact, since the installation of this club, which the well-to-do of the town had not recognized as a necessary bit of comfort until recently, Fred had formed the habit of arriving home every evening with such a complete set of eighteenth-century manners that there was no little uneasiness about him in his branch of the Oliphant family.

At present he was leaning forward in his chair, a hand politely cupped about his ear to give an appearance of more profound attention to what Dan was saying. The latter stood at the other end of the room, before the fire, and with great earnestness addressed this ardent listener; but Harlan was

relieved to see that although his brother's eyes were extraordinarily bright and his cheeks ruddier than usual, there appeared no other symptoms, except his eloquence, of his dalliance at the club. "No, and always no!" he was protesting as the door opened. "If we lose that, we lose everything! This country——"

But here Fred sprang up to take the tray from Martha. "Permit me! Indeed permit me!" he begged. "It must not be said of an Oliphant that he allowed a lady to perform menial——"

"No, no!" She laughed, and evading his assistance, set the tray upon a table. "Do sit down, Fred."

"Since it is *you* who command it!" he said gallantly and returned to his chair; but on the way perceived the gloomy Harland and bowed to him. "My dear sir!" he said. "This is an honour as unexpected as it is gracious; an honour not only to our hostess but to——"

"Sit down!" Harlan said brusquely.

"Since it is *you* who command it!" the other returned with the happy air of a man who delivers an entirely novel bit of repartee; then bowed again and complied.

Dan came forward from his place before the fire. "Why, Harlan!" he exclaimed. "I thought you went to spend the evening with grandma."

"I did," Harlan returned, and added pointedly: "Several hours ago!"

"But it isn't late, is it?"

"No," Martha said quickly;—"it isn't. Won't you both please sit down and let me give you some coffee?"

"Really——" Harlan began, but she checked him and had her way; though Dan did not sit down. Instead, he returned to the fireplace with the coffee she gave him. "What I was tryin' to explain to Fred when you came in," he said;—"it was something I don't think he understood at all, but I believe *you* would, Martha."

"I beg you; I beg you," the courtly Frederic interposed. "I was never gifted, yet I understood you perfectly. You said,

'If we lose that, we lose everything.' I think you must have been speaking of champagne."

"No, no," Dan said, and for a moment appeared to be slightly annoyed; then he brightened. "I told you several times I meant our work for the new generation. The minute a man gets to be a father he belongs to the *old* generation, and the only use he is, it's to plan for the new one. From then on, that's what his whole life ought to be—just buildin' up the world for his son. Now you take this boy o' mine——"

"Excuse me," his cousin interrupted earnestly. "You're referring now to the one who was born late this afternoon?"

"I mean my *boy!*" Dan replied; and his face glowed with the triumphant word. "I have a son! Didn't you know it?"

"It's been mentioned, I believe, during the evening," Frederic answered. "Excuse me, pray."

"When he grows up," Dan went on radiantly, "he's got to find everything better because of the work the old generation's got to do to make it that way. That's what we're put in the world *for!* I never knew what I was for until to-day. I knew I was meant for *something;* I knew I ought to be makin' plans and tryin' to build *up;* but I didn't see just what for. I thought I did, but I didn't. That's what I wanted to explain to Martha, because she's the only one that could understand. It's the reason for the universe."

"You surprise me," Frederic remarked; and he replaced his cup with careful accuracy upon its saucer on the arm of his chair. "Correct me if I fail to follow you, but are you fair to your son? If he's the reason for the universe he ought to be able to grasp a few simple truths. You say Martha is the only person who could understand, but have you ever tried to make *him* understand?"

Dan laughed happily, in high good humour. "That boy'll understand soon enough!" he cried. "You wait till he's old enough for me to drive him out to Ornaby and let him look it over and see where his father fought, bled, and died to build it for him! You wait till he learns to drive an automobile from his father's and his uncle's own factory!"

"His uncle's?" Frederic repeated, turning to Harlan. "Forgive me if I trespass upon private ground, but I haven't heard——"

"I have nothing to do with it," Harlan said, frowning with an annoyance that had been increasing since his entrance into the room. "He means his wife's brother." He leaned toward Martha, who sat looking quietly at the radiant Dan. "Did you ever hear wilder nonsense?" he said in a low voice. "I really suspect he's a little mad. Do tell us to go home."

"No, no," she whispered, and returned her attention instantly to Dan, who was explaining to his cousin.

"My brother-in-law in New York, George McMillan, wrote me he'd got hold of an engineer who'd made designs for a wonderful improvement in automobile engines. McMillan wants to come out here, and he and I think of goin' into it together. We want to build a factory over on the west edge of Ornaby, where it won't interfere with the residential section."

"The residential section?" his cousin repeated in a tone of gentle inquiry. "Do I comprehend you? It's over where you've got that tool shed?"

"*No*, sir!" Dan exclaimed triumphantly. "We moved the tool shed this very morning because yesterday the lot it stood on was sold. Yes, sir; Ornaby Addition has begun to exist!"

At this Martha's quiet attitude altered; she leaned forward and clapped her hands. "Dan! Is it true? Have you sold some lots?"

"The first one," he answered proudly. "The very first lot was sold the day before my son was born!"

"How splendid!" she cried. "And they'll build on it right away?"

"No; not right away," he admitted. "That is, not much of a house, so to speak. It was bought by a man that wants to own a small picnic ground of his own, because he's got a large family; and at first he's only goin' to have a sort of shack there. But he *will* build when he sees the other houses goin' up all around him."

"Pardon me," said Frederic Oliphant. "Which other houses are you mentioning now?"

"The houses that *will* go up there," Dan returned promptly. "The houses that'll be there for my young son to see."

"Your 'young son?'" Fred repeated. "Your son is still young yet, then? It's remarkable when you consider he's the meaning of the universe. You feel that when he grows up he'll have houses to look at?"

Dan's chest expanded with the great breath he took; his high colour grew higher, his bright eyes brighter. "Just *think* what he'll have to look at when he grows up! Why, the nurse let me hold him a few minutes, and I got to thinkin' about how I'm goin' to work for him, and then about how this country's moved ahead every minute since it was begun, goin' ahead faster and faster till now it just jumps out from under your feet if you stand still a *second*—and it grows so big and it grows so magnificent that when I thought of what sort of a world it's goin' to be for my son, I declare I was almost afraid to look at him; it was like lookin' at somebody that's born to be a god!"

He spoke with such honest fervour, and with such belief in what he said, that, for the moment, even his bibulous cousin said nothing, but sat in an emotional silence, staring at him. As for Martha, an edge of tears suddenly showed along her eyelids; but Harlan was not so susceptible. "Dear me!" he said dryly. "After that burst of eloquence don't you think we'd better be starting for home? At least it would avoid an anti-climax."

Dan had been so rapt in his moment of vision, his exultant glimpse of a transcendent world for his son's heritage, that his brother's dry voice confused him;—he was like a balloonist who unexpectedly finds the earth rising swiftly to meet him. "What?" he said blankly; and then, as secondary perceptions clarified Harlan's suggestion to him, he laughed. "Why, yes; of course we ought to be goin'; we mustn't keep Martha up," he said. "Harlan, you always do find a way to make me look mighty ridiculous. I guess I am, too!"

With that, shaking his head and laughing, he brought his cup and saucer to the tray upon the table beside Martha, and turned to her. "Good-night, Martha. I guess I talk like a fool, but you know it doesn't happen every day, my gettin' to be a father! I want to bring him over to see you the first time they'll let him outdoors. I want you to be his godmother, Martha. I want you to help bring him up." She rose, and he took her hand as he said good-night again; and then, going toward the door, he added cheerfully, with a complete unconsciousness that there might be thought something a little odd about such a speech: "What I hope most is, I hope he'll grow up to be like *you!*"

Martha's colour deepened as she met Harlan's gaze for an instant; and she turned quickly to say good-night to the solemn Frederic, who was bowing profoundly before her. "Permit me, indeed," he murmured, and followed Dan out into the hall.

Thus, for a moment, Martha and Harlan were alone together; and he stepped nearer to her. "Mother wanted me to apologize for him," he said. "I do hope you'll——"

"Apologize for him?" she echoed incredulously. "Why? Don't you suppose I'm glad he wanted to come here?"

"But under the circumstances——"

"No," she said proudly. "I'd always be glad—under any circumstances."

He looked at her, smiled with a melancholy humour not devoid of some compassion for her, as well as for himself, and assented in a rueful voice, "I suppose so!" But, having turned to go, he paused and asked wistfully: "Are there any circumstances under which anything *I* could do would make you glad?"

"In some ways, why, of course," she answered with a cordiality that did not hearten him; for he sighed, understanding in what ways he had no power to make her glad.

"All right," he said, and, straightening his drooped shoulders, strode out to join his brother and cousin in the hall.

Young Mr. Frederic Oliphant was lost in a thoughtful si-

lence while the three went down the path to the gate, but as they passed this portal, his attention was caught by external circumstances. "Excuse me if I appear to seek assistance upon a point of natural history," he said;—"but wasn't it raining or something when we came in here?" And, being assured that rain had fallen at the time he mentioned, he went on: "That makes it all the more remarkable, my not noticing it's cleared up until we got all the way out here to the sidewalk. I was thinking about Dan's speech."

"Never you mind about my 'speech,'" Dan returned jovially. "You'll make speeches yourself if you ever have a son. I could make speeches all night long! Want to hear me?"

"Don't begin till we reach your gate," Fred said. "I'm going to leave you and Harlan there and go back to the club. But when I spoke of your speech I didn't mean the one you made over by the fireplace, the one all about your son's being the meaning of the universe and gods and everything. I meant your last speech—not a speech exactly, but what you said to Martha."

"I didn't say anything to her except 'good-night.'"

"It *seemed* to me you did," Fred said apologetically. "I may be wrong, but it seemed to me you said something more. Didn't it seem so to you, Harlan?"

"Yes, it did," Harlan answered briefly. The group had paused at the Oliphants' gate, and he opened it, about to pass within.

But his cousin detained him. "Wait a moment, I mean about Dan's hoping the baby would grow up to look like Martha. Didn't it strike you——"

Dan laughed. "Oh, that? No; I said something about hoping he'd grow up to be like her: I meant I hoped he'd have her qualities."

"I see," young Mr. Oliphant said pensively. "The only reason it struck me as peculiar was I thought that was what the father usually said to the mother."

Thereupon he lifted his hat politely, bowed and walked away, leaving both of the brothers staring after him.

CHAPTER XV

HIS humour was misplaced, and both of them would have been nothing less than dismayed could they have foreseen in what manner he was destined to misplace it again, and to what damage; for not gossip, nor scandal, nor slander's very self can leave a trail more ruinous than may a merry bit of drollery misplaced. The occasion of the catastrophe was not immediate, however; it befell a month later, when the Oliphants made a celebration to mark the arrival of the baby and the completed recovery of the baby's mother. Mrs. Oliphant gave a "family dinner."

She felt that something in the nature of a mild banquet was called for, and her interpretation of "the family" was a liberal one. Except those within her household, and except her mother, who was still somehow "hanging on," she had no relatives of her own; but the kinsfolk of her husband were numerous, and she invited them all to meet their new little kinsman.

They were presented to this personage; and then the jubilant father, carrying him high in his arms and shouting, led a lively procession into the dining-room. The baby behaved well, in spite of the noise his father made, and showed no alarm to be held so far aloft in the air, even when he was lifted as high as his bearer's arms could reach.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Dan shouted, thus interpreting his offspring's thoughts in the matter, "grandparents, great-uncles, great-aunts, uncle Harlan, second-cousins and third-cousins, kindly sit down and eat as much as you can. And please remember I invite you to my christening, one week from next Sunday; and if you want to know what's goin' to be my name, why, it's Henry for my grandpa, and Daniel for my papa, and Oliphant for all of us. Take a good look at

me, because I'm Henry Daniel Oliphant, ladies and gentlemen, the son and heir to Ornaby Addition!"

There was cheering and applause; then the company sat down; the nurse took the little lacy white bundle from the protesting father's arms; and Henry Daniel Oliphant was borne away amid the customary demonstrations, and carried upstairs to his cradle.

Dan, at the head of the table, held forth in the immemorial manner of young fathers: the baby had laughed his first laugh that very morning;—Dan was sure it was neither an illusion of his own nor a chance configuration of the baby's features. It was absolutely an actual human laugh, although at first the astounded parent hadn't been able to believe it, because he'd never heard of any baby's laughing when it was only a month old. But when Henry Daniel laughed not once, but twice, and moreover went on laughing for certainly as long as thirty-five seconds, the fact was proven and no longer to be doubted. "No, sir, I just had to believe my own eyes when he kept right *on* laughin' up at me that way, as if he thought I was a mighty funny lookin' old thing to be his daddy. My, but it does seem like a miracle to have your son look up at you that way and laugh! I hope he'll keep doin' it his whole life long, too. I'm certainly goin' to do all *I* can to keep him from ever havin' anything happen he can't laugh at!"

He continued, becoming jovially oratorical upon his theme, while down at the other end of the long table, sitting between the baby's grandfather and grandmother, Lena now and then gave him a half-veiled, quick glance that a chance observer might have defined as inscrutable.

Her pretty black-and-white dress of fluffy chiffon was designed with a more revealing coquetry than the times sanctioned; so that her amiable father-in-law, though not himself conscious of any dissapproval, withheld from expression his thought that it was just as well that Mrs. Savage could not be of the company. The ruthless old lady might have supplemented her "lesson" to Lena, although it had produced somewhat pointedly the reverse of its intended effect. The young

mother was "painted" more dashingly than the bride had been, and her lips as well as her cheeks were made so vivid that probably her friends in New York would have found her more than ever the French doll—a discontented French doll, they might have said.

Yet, to her credit, if she was discontented, she made an effort not to seem so; she chattered gaily to her mother-in-law and Mr. Oliphant, laughed with them about Dan's bragging of his offspring, and coquetted demurely with one or two elderly cousins-in-law. A young one, Mr. Frederic Oliphant, seemed genuinely to amuse her, which was what led to misfortune. He found her laughter a sweet fluting in his ears, and, wishing to hear more of it, elaborated the solemn-mannered waggeries that produced it.

"It's a great thing to be the only father in the world," he said. "I suppose it's even greater than being an earl."

"Why than an earl particularly?" she asked.

"Didn't you know? At the club and downtown nowadays they speak of your husband as the 'Earl of Ornaby.' You may not have noticed it, but he sometimes mentions a place called Ornaby Addition. Now that he's got another subject though, I suspect his title ought to be changed to 'Father of the Heir to Ornaby.' Doesn't that seem more intriguing, if I may employ the expression?"

"Most intriguing!" she agreed. "But since my husband's the 'Earl,' am I called the 'Countess of Ornaby'?"

"No; they leave you out of it, and I'm afraid you'll be left out of it again if the new title's conferred on him. No one would get an idea from his orations that the Heir to Ornaby has a mother. A father would seem to be Henry Daniel's sole and total ancestry." Then, as she laughed again, Fred added his unfortunate afterthought. "No; I forgot. I believe he does include a godmother as sort of a secondary necessity."

"Does he? We haven't talked about who's to be the godmother yet. We haven't selected one."

"'We?'" Fred repeated, affecting surprise. "You seem to think you have something to do with it! Perhaps when the

father of the Heir to Ornaby gets around to it, he may condescend to inform you that the godmother was selected the very night after the heir was born."

"Was she?" Lena laughed. "Where? At the club?"

"Goodness, no! Don't you know where Dan went that night?"

"Just to the club, didn't he?" Lena said cheerfully, a little surprised. "That's all I heard mentioned about it afterwards at least."

"Ah, they cover up these things from you, I see. It's time somebody warned you of what's going on." And Fred was inspired to add: "Haven't you realized yet there's an enchantress living right next door to you?"

From the young man's own point of view, this was foolery altogether harmless: Martha Shelby was almost "one of the family"—so near to being one of them, in fact, that he would not have been at all surprised to find her included in this family party—and the episode of his call upon her, with his cousin, upon the night after the baby's birth, seemed to him of no other than a jocose significance. Like Dan's "speech" to Martha, it merely illustrated the hare-brained condition of a new-made father, and in that light was handy material for a family dinner-table humorist.

In this capacity, therefore, he blundered on. "Yes, indeed —right next door! Old Dan may *look* like the steady, plodding homebody sort of husband, but when that type really breaks out it's the wildest of all."

Lena gave the *farceur* a sidelong glance the sobriety of which he failed to perceive; but at once she seemed to fall in with the spirit of his burlesquing, and, assuming a mock solemnity herself, "This is terrible news!" she said. "I suspected him of being rather wild, but I didn't suppose he'd go so far as to appoint an enchantress to be the godmother."

"And not only appointed her, but called on her in the middle of the night to notify her of the appointment," Fred added. "Not only that, but dragged *me* along to be a chaperon!"

"No! Did he? How funny!"

"The way he behaved when we got there, I think he needed one!" the youth continued, expanding in the warmth of her eagerly responsive laughter. "We *did* get oratory! He explained to the enchantress that she was the only person who could understand his son's being a god and the meaning of the universe; but that wasn't all. Oh, not by any means!"

"But he *couldn't* have done worse than that!" she laughed. "Are you sure?"

Fred was so overcome by mirthful recollection that he was unable to retain his affectation of solemnity;—a sputtering chuckle escaped him. "I wish you'd been there to hear him telling Martha he wanted Henry Daniel to grow up to be like *her!*"

"No! Did he?"

The jovial Frederic failed to catch the overtone in her voice, but happening to glance at Harlan, who sat opposite him, he was surprised, too late, by a brief pantomime of warning. Harlan frowned and pointedly shook his head; and at the same time Mrs. Oliphant, across whom the merry colloquy had taken place, began hastily to talk to Fred about his health. His mother had told her that he was ruining it at the club, she said amiably, and, to his mystification, became voluble upon the subject; but she also was too late. Lena continued to laugh, and, turning to Mr. Oliphant, prattled cheerily about nothing;—but Harlan saw her covert glance at the other end of the table where her husband was still bragging of Henry Daniel; and, although her eyelids quickly descended upon it, this glance was an evanescent spark glowing brightly for an instant through the fringe of blackened lashes.

When the party left the table to prepare for the charades —the customary entertainment offered to one another by the Oliphants on such occasions—Frederic sought an opportunity to speak privately with Harlan.

"What on earth were you shaking your head at me like that for? *I* wasn't saying anything."

"Weren't you?"

"Certainly not! And your mother kept talking to me as

fast as she could all the rest of the time we were at the table. Looked as if she was afraid for me to open my mouth again! What was it all about?"

"Nothing."

"Then what made you act as if it was something?" Fred inquired. "You certainly don't think your sister-in-law would ever be jealous of dear old *Martha*, do you?"

"Oh, no," Harlan said. "Not jealous. They don't get on very well, though, I believe."

"What? Why, I passed by here only the other day and saw Martha coming out of the front door. She was laughing and waving her hand back to someone in the doorway and——"

"Oh, yes. She still comes to see mother sometimes, as she always did; but I believe she doesn't ask for Lena any more when she comes. I understand Lena has never returned her call. You may have noticed that ladies regard those things as important?"

"What of it? Lena would certainly understand. I'd never have mentioned our going in there that night if there'd been any reason for her to mind it," Fred protested. "What's more, she *doesn't* mind it. Look at her now."

He nodded toward where, across the broad drawing-room, Lena was helping to set the stage for the first of the charades. She moved with a dancing step, laughing and chattering to the group about her; and as she dropped a green velvet table cover over the back of an armchair, announcing that this drapery made the chair into a throne, she flung out her graceful little arms and whirled herself round and round in an airy pirouette. Fred laughed aloud, finding himself well warranted in thinking his cousin's uneasiness superfluous; for Lena seemed to be, indeed, the life of the party. Moreover, she remained in these high spirits all evening; and Harlan began to feel reassured, for this was what he and his mother and father had learned to think of as "Lena's other mood"; and sometimes it lasted for several days.

The present example of it was not to cover so extensive a

period, however; although when the guests had gone she kissed her mother-in-law good-night affectionately, patted Mr. Oliphant's shoulder, and then waved a sparkling little hand over the banisters to Harlan as she skipped upstairs and he stood below, locking the front doors. Humming "Tell me, pretty maiden," from "Floradora," she disappeared from his sight in the direction of her own room, but it was not there she went.

Instead, she opened the door beyond hers, stepped within and closed it;—and during this slight and simple series of commonplace movements she underwent a sharp alteration. She had carried her liveliness all the way to the very door-knob, and, until she touched it, was still the pirouetting Lena who had been the life of the party; then suddenly she stood in the room, haggard; so that what happened to her was like the necromantic withering of a bright flower during the mere opening and closing of a door.

It was Dan's room, and he had just taken off his coat, preparing for bed. "Got to be out at Ornaby by six to-morrow morning," he explained. "A contractor's goin' to meet me there to pick out a site for our automobile works. I won't get much sleep, I guess—up at five this morning, too." He yawned, and then, laughing, apologized. "I beg your pardon, Lena; I don't mean I'm sleepy, if you want to talk the party over. You were just lovely this evening, and the whole family thought so, too. You made it a great success, and you can be certain we all appreciate it. *I* certainly do."

Facing him blankly, leaning back against the door with her hands behind her, she said nothing; and he stepped toward her solicitously. "I'm afraid you tired yourself out at it—only a week out of bed, poor child! You look——"

"Never mind how I look," she said in a low voice, and as his hand was extended placatively, to pet her, she struck at it. "Just you keep away from me!"

"Why, Lena!" he cried. "What in the world's the matter?"

She continued to stare at him, not replying, and he saw that she was trembling slightly from head to foot. "Lena!

You're lettin' yourself get all upset over something or other again. You've gone ever since Henry was born without gettin' this way. I was almost in hopes—in hopes——"

"Yes?" she said, as he faltered. "What were your hopes?"

"Why, I was almost in hopes it—it wouldn't happen again."

"What wouldn't happen again?"

"Your gettin' upset like this," he answered apologetically. "I honestly did pretty near hope it, Lena. It seemed to me we'd maybe kind of reached a turning point and could get along all right together, now Henry's come to us."

"Maybe we *have* reached a turning point," she said. "I suppose it's generally considered *quite* a turning point when a wife leaves her husband for just cause, isn't it?"

"Oh, dear me!" Dan sighed, and sat down heavily on the side of his bed, taking his head between his hands. "I guess we've got to go through another of 'em."

"Another of what?"

"Another of these troubles," he sighed. "Well, what's this one all about, Lena?"

She came toward him angrily. "I'd like to know what you'd think of any other man that treated his wife as you do me! What would you say of any other man who went out the very night his child was born and did what you did?"

"Why, I didn't do anything," he said, and looked up at her, surprised.

"You didn't? Don't you call it anything to go to see that woman at midnight?"

"You mean our goin' in to Martha's?" Dan asked, his surprise increasing. "It wasn't midnight; it was about ten o'clock, and we only stayed a few minutes—half an hour maybe. I just wanted to tell her about the baby."

"Yes, so I hear," Lena returned bitterly. "You took particularly good care not to mention that little call to me afterwards!"

"No; I didn't," he protested. "I never thought of it! I've been too busy thinkin' about the baby and Ornaby. I don't

say though"—he paused, and then went on with painful honesty: "I don't say I *would* have mentioned it to you, if I *had* thought of it. I know you've never liked Martha. We could all see that, and it's been sort of a trouble to us——"

"To 'us?'" she interrupted sharply. "To whom?"

"Well, to me, of course; but I mean mother, too, though she's never said anything about it. We've all been as fond of Martha all her life as if she was one of our own family, and, for instance, I think mother was probably a little worried because she thought she'd better not invite her to-night, on your account. What I mean, though, is that I probably mightn't have told you about our goin' in to see her that night, even if I had thought of it afterwards, because as I knew how you felt about her I'd have been afraid of it's gettin' you into one of these upsetnesses. I guess I'd have been right, too," he added, with a rueful laugh. "Somebody's told you about it, and you *have* got into one."

"How kind of you! So you admit you went running to her the minute the baby was born, and yet you knew perfectly well how I felt about her."

"Well—I knew how unreasonably you felt about her."

"'Unreasonably?'" Lena cried shrilly. "What a wise little word! When you told her she was the only woman in the world who understands you!"

"No, no! *I* don't care who understands me," Dan protested unhappily. "I meant she was the only one that would understand what I was sayin' about the baby. I just *had* to talk about him, and she always understands anything at a time like that—or any time, for that matter. She——"

"Go on!" Lena said. "Go on making it worse!"

"But I'm only tryin' to explain how——"

"Explain *this*, then! You told her you wanted my child to grow up to be like *her*."

"Why, yes," Dan said. "I didn't mean to *look* like her; I only meant I hoped he'd have her qualities. Anybody that knows Martha would feel that way, Lena. Why, except my own father and mother, she's the most even-tempered, un-

derstanding, helpful kind of person I ever knew in my life. Why, everybody in town looks up to her just the same as I do, and *any*body'd have said *that* to her, Lena. You would yourself, if you had only not let yourself get prejudiced against her about nothin' at all and just been sensible enough to really get acquainted with her."

Lena stood before him rigidly, except for the trembling, which had increased a little. "Tell me another thing," she said. "When a young wife becomes a mother, does her husband ever consult her before inviting a woman she doesn't like to act as godmother for the child?"

Dan got up and began to pace the room, his face reddening with a prophetic distress. "Oh, golly!" he groaned. "You're goin' to object to it. I see that now!"

"You do see it, do you? How remarkable!"

He turned to her appealingly. "Look here, Lena; I *did* speak about it to her too soon. Of course I ought to've consulted you first;—I was just so enthusiastic about bein' the boy's father, and she's such a dear, good, old friend—well, I guess I was excited. I know I ought to've waited and asked you who you wanted—but I didn't. I *did* just blurt out and ask her, so it's done and can't be helped. Well, I can't go back on it; I *can't* go over there and just plain tell her you don't want her!"

"Can't you?" Lena said. "It doesn't matter to me what you tell her."

"You're not goin' to make me, are you?" he asked piteously.

"No. Tell her anything you like."

Mistaking this icy permission, he uttered an almost vociferous sigh of relief. "Well, I do truly thank you, Lena. If you're noble enough to overlook my selfishness in not thinkin' about who you'd want to have for Henry's godmother—well, my goodness, I *am* grateful to you, and I know it's more'n I deserve. It's a noble action on your part, and I'm sure it's goin' to lead to splendid results, because now you can't help but get better acquainted with Martha, and you'll do what

I've hoped for so long: you'll get to likin' her and thinkin' as much of her as everybody else does. With her in that relation——"

"In what relation?"

"In the relation of the baby's godmother. From the very day of the christening you'll——"

"There may not be any such day," Lena interrupted. "You seem to have mistaken me. There may not be any christening—at least not here. If she's to be the godmother, the baby and I will be with my own family in New York."

"Oh, golly!" Dan said, and sank down on the side of the bed again. "Oh, golly!"

Lena became vehement. "I should think you *would* say 'golly'! If you had a spark of remorse in you, I think you'd say more than that!"

"Remorse? I don't see——"

"You don't?" she cried. "You don't see what you have to be remorseful for? You bring me out here to the life you've given me, and you see nothing to regret? You bring me to this flat town and its flat people, where not once in months can I hear a note of real music and where there's no art and no beauty and no *life*—after you'd given me your word I should have a full year in Europe!—and you watch me struggling to bear it, to bear it with the best bravery I have in me, and the most kindness to you—and to be cheerful—and I *dare* you to say I haven't made the best of it! I *have*—and how *hard* I've had to try most of the time to accomplish it! And what have you been? Who was the man I found I'd married? Even in this hole of a town he's called a failure—the town failure! That's who you got me to marry! Even these people out here—your own people—even they take you as a joke—the town joke! And when I make the best of it I can and bear it the best I can, and go on, month after month, not complaining, and suffer what I suffered when the baby came, you go gaily over to the woman whose hand you held the very first day I came here—yes, you did!—and the woman you've compared me to unfavourably every time you've ever dared to speak of

me to her—yes, you have; every single *time!*—and you ask her to come and be the godmother to my child! You can go over there and tell her anything you like—tell her again you want my baby to be like her—but there's one thing you'd better tell her besides, and that is, there won't *be* any christening if she comes to it!"

She ran out, the closing of the door reverberating eloquently through the house; and Dan remained seated upon the side of the bed, his head between his hands. It was by no means the first time he had remained in that position when Lena slammed the door.

CHAPTER XVI

HIS attitude had not changed, fifteen minutes later, when there came a light tapping upon that mishandled door of his; and at the sound he rose quickly, said, "Yes, mother," and tried to regain his usual cheerfulness of aspect as Mrs. Oliphant came in noiselessly. She was smiling, and he was able to construct a smile in return, telling her she looked "mighty pretty" in her rose-coloured negligee—a compliment not exaggerated. Serenity, a good faith, and a cheerful disposition bring beauty in time even where it has not been; and, where beauty has always been, as it had with Mrs. Oliphant, white hair is only that crowning prettiness so knowingly sought by the ladies of the eighteenth century when they powdered their blonde or brunette ringlets.

"I just thought I'd slip in for a minute," she said apologetically. "I was afraid you might forget you had to be up so early to-morrow morning, and get to thinking about something and not go to bed at all."

"Oh, no; don't worry. I'll not do that again," he said. "It doesn't do any good, I know. I suppose you heard her?"

She patted his cheek, smiling up at him and resolutely withholding from expression the compassion that had brought her to him. "I just wanted to tell you not to be troubled. You'll have to give her a little more time to get adjusted, Dan. A great many young couples don't manage all these little adjustments until after the first few years of marriage; and I think my own father and mother didn't manage it even that soon;—I'm afraid I remember their having some rather troubled times when I was a pretty old little girl. You mustn't let yourself be discouraged, dear. Lena really tries to get the best of herself, and though she fails sometimes——"

"It isn't that," he interrupted. "At least it seemed to be

something more definite than usual this time. You see, I didn't stop to think about consulting her, and asked Martha to be Henry Daniel's godmother."

"I heard Fred Oliphant say so, but I thought perhaps he was only trying to tease Lena." For a moment Mrs. Oliphant looked disturbed, but brightened with a quickly reassuring second thought. "Well, that would be lovely, and I'm glad you did it; but Martha'll decline."

"She didn't, though, when I asked her."

"What did she say?"

Dan rubbed his forehead. "Well, I don't remember that she said anything."

"No?" His mother laughed. "You won't have to withdraw your invitation, if that's what's troubling, you Dan."

"It *is* troubling me," he admitted despondently. "I just couldn't go over there and tell her——"

"No," Mrs. Oliphant said. "And Martha'd never let you."

"You mean *you'd* tell her——"

"No. Nobody'll say a word to her about it. Don't you know Martha well enough yet to understand that she won't expect to be Henry's godmother?"

"But she must."

"No. If she did, she'd have spoken of it to me."

"That does look like it a little," he said with some relief; then frowned again. "But I *want* her to be the godmother; and she *ought* to be. Lena hasn't any great friend of her own that she wants for it; and Martha's the best friend I ever——"

"No, no," his mother interrupted hurriedly. "It wouldn't do, Dan."

"But why?"

"Well——" she hesitated, sighed, and went on: "We all love Martha—except Lena. I'm afraid that's reason enough. You must give it up."

"I'm afraid so," he agreed gloomily. "Oh, lordy!"

"Now, now! Martha knows you wanted her, and that's all she'll care about. She——" Mrs. Oliphant paused with the bothered air of one who fears to elaborate an indiscretion al-

ready committed. Then she continued nervously: "There was something else I wanted to speak to you about. Your father and I—we've been a little afraid——" She hesitated again.

"Afraid of what, mother?"

"Well, we were talking over this long struggle of yours to make a success of the Addition, Dan; and of course we've seen how hard you've been pressed from the very first, and yet you've always kept the thing a little alive and held on to it when time after time everybody said you'd just have to let go."

"Yes, mother?"

"Well, it seems your father heard downtown to-day that *this* time you'd—you'd——"

"This time I'd what, mother?"

She put her arms about him and, in spite of her resolution, the compassion she felt for him was evident in her voice and in her eyes. "Oh, Dan, if this time you can't hold on to it any longer, you mustn't feel too badly, please!"

He had bent over her as she embraced him; but now he threw back his shoulders and laughed. "So that's what father heard to-day," he said. "You tell him he was listening to the wrong crowd, mother!" He moved her gently toward the door, his arm about her. "You go to bed, and so will I." He laughed again, not grimly or bitterly, but with deep and hearty mirth. "Why, there isn't any more chance of my not keepin' hold of Ornaby than there is of this house fallin' off the earth onto the moon! They can't foreclose on me for anyhow two weeks more, and by that time I'll show 'em what's what! I sold a lot only last month, and there've been three more men out there already to look at locations. Two weeks is plenty of time for things to happen, mother. Don't you worry."

He kissed her good-night, and as she smiled back at him from the hall and told him she wouldn't worry if he'd get some sleep, he went on: "Why, they haven't any more chance to get Ornaby away from me than they have to—than they have to"—he paused, searching for a sufficient comparison, and,

finding it, finished with cheery explosiveness—"than they have to get Henry Daniel Oliphant himself away from me!"

Upon this she went to her own door down the hall, where she nodded and whispered back to him a smiling good-night, and disappeared, glad to see him so abundantly recovered from his brief depression. "Somehow I believe he *will* manage to keep on going, even this time," she told her husband. "He's so sure failure's an absolute impossibility that I do think maybe——"

"No, I don't see even a 'maybe' in it for him," Mr. Oliphant said, and shook his head. "Not *this* time, I'm afraid."

But the Earl of Ornaby was in the field by sunrise the next morning, and armoured in convictions so strong that he began the day with plans, not for the retention of the threatened domain, but for an extension of it; he went to see a farmer who owned sixty acres north of Ornaby and got an option on them before keeping his appointment with a contractor to select a site for the airily projected automobile factory.

Not until the afternoon did he go downtown to see about raising a little money on a note to fend off the impending foreclosure; and he was still undiscouraged when he came home that evening without having succeeded. There were thirteen long days left, he told his mother, in the hall near the front door, where she met him when he came in; and she responded sunnily that thirteen was a lucky number, then gave him a note of a kind different from the one he had spent the afternoon trying to negotiate.

"You see I was right," she said. "Didn't I tell you she'd understand? Their housemaid brought it in this morning after breakfast."

Martha had written to Mrs. Oliphant:

> We're in such a rush of packing I won't have time to come in and say good-bye, as I'd like to. Papa has to go to New York, and I've decided I ought to go with him, because there are so many automobiles there now, and he hasn't learned that they're getting even worse than the bicycle "speeders" about running over people.
>
> We'll be there two or three weeks and I've almost persuaded him

to let me show him Quebec and the Saguenay—and he says he *might* be willing to take the boat from Montreal for a little run to England after that!

Please give my love to Mr. Oliphant and Harlan for me, and of course to Dan, whom I haven't seen since his great evening after the baby was born. He was so funny and delightful, and he talked with such really true wisdom, too! I wanted to remember everything he said, but the trouble was that he talked so fast and said so much that the next day I couldn't remember any of it at all!

Please say good-bye for us to Mrs. Savage. Tell her when we get home we expect to find her downstairs again and enjoying the view from that big window of hers where she's always loved to sit. Tell her papa wants to come with me to see her. He wants to talk with her about the old days when this was a little town. There aren't so many left now he can do that with, though I know Mrs. Savage regards him as a mere youth, comparatively! He asks me to say good-bye to Mr. Oliphant, and all of you for him—and for myself I close with good-bye to *you* and send you my best love, always.

"Lordy!" Dan said, staring at this missive when he had finished reading it. "She *is* goin' to be gone a long while! I don't get to see her often, but it's always mighty satisfactory to know she's *there*—just next door. That house'll look pretty empty for a while, won't it?" He sighed. "Well, I suppose I'd better go and let Lena know there's nothin' to disturb her now about the christening."

Mrs. Oliphant told him lightly that she had already informed her daughter-in-law of Martha's departure, and that it would be better for him not to mention the subject again; —Lena had selected his aunt Olive as a proper godmother. Dan looked rueful, but muttered an unenthusiastic consent and went into the library to consult his father upon the best way to raise money in thirteen days.

Mr. Oliphant was unable to offer him either the money itself or practical advice how to get it. "I'm afraid it looks like pretty hard luck this time, Dan, old fellow," he said. "It's funny a man with as good a practice as mine can't ever seem to be able to lay his hands on a little cash that doesn't have to go right out on some old debt. If I just didn't have

to meet that confounded note I went on for poor old Tom Vertrees I——"

"No, no," his son protested:—"I wouldn't let you, if you could. My conscience'd trouble me about what I did let you do for me if I wasn't so sure you'll get paid back with seven per cent. interest as soon as I begin to get these lots to sellin' off a little faster."

"What about the three men your mother tells me have been out there looking at lots since you sold the first one? Couldn't you offer them a reduction in the price for a little cash in hand?"

"I did," Dan replied. "I did that the first thing with each of 'em. But one of 'em told a darkey I've got workin' out there he thought he could get what he wanted still cheaper after the mortgage is foreclosed; and I guess maybe the other two thought the same way about it. I guess that's the way those seven people felt that came when I tried to auction off some lots awhile back."

"I'm afraid so. I hope you aren't going to take it too hard, Dan."

"Take what too hard, sir?"

"There are other things you can go into, my boy. You've shown you've got immense energy and perseverance. They may laugh at you, but you can be sure they like the grit you've shown, and if you *do* have to give up the idea——"

"What idea, sir?"

"I mean the idea of this Addition," his father explained. "If the time's come when you have to let it go——"

"Ornaby?" Dan interrupted with an incredulity wholly untouched by the facts confronting him. "Why, you just put any such notion out of your mind, sir." And he repeated the extreme comparison he had made the night before. "Why, I'm not goin' to let Ornaby go any more than I am our little namesake upstairs in his cradle! I'm goin' to keep it this time and every time! I've got thirteen days left and I'll find *some* way!"

He kept Ornaby "this time," but in spite of his determined

prophecy and all he did to fulfil it, six of his thirteen days passed and he had not found the way. Indeed, he did not find the way at all; for it was found through none of his seeking. On the seventh of the thirteen days his grandmother sent for him to come to talk to her in the evening; and when he sat down beside her and for a moment covered the ghostly hand on the coverlet with his own, he told her truthfully that she was looking better.

"Why, a great *deal* better!" he said. "I guess you're goin' to do what Martha said in her message, grandma, and get downstairs again before she comes home."

"Do you think so?" she said in a voice a little stronger than it was when he had last talked with her. "You think I might fool that doctor after all?"

"But doesn't he say you're better, grandma?"

"Yes," she said, and smiled faintly. "But he doesn't think so. Told me this morning I was better and then came three times during the day! *He* doesn't fool anybody."

"But you're goin' to get well," her grandson assured her. "What I want to know is: When are you goin' to let me bring that baby to see you? Mother says you don't——"

"No, no," she interrupted peevishly. "I don't want to see any babies."

"But, grandma, you've never seen any baby like——"

"No, no!"

"But you don't understand what a baby can be *like*," he persisted. "I don't know I ever thought much of babies generally, either; but I've found out there's just as much difference between 'em as there is between people. Think of this, for instance: one day I was bendin' down over him, just lookin' at him—and this was before he was even four weeks old, remember—and all at once he took the notion I must be kind of funny. He broke right out in a laugh! He did! It was a real laugh, too, though a good many people might think I imagined it; because I've asked everybody I know, pretty near, and not one of 'em said they ever heard of a baby only four weeks old that could——"

"Stop!" she protested. "I didn't send for you to talk about your baby."

"But, grandma, if you'd just let me bring him to see you——"

"I don't want to hear anything about him, and I've only got one thing to say about him myself. You better not let him listen to his mother when he learns to talk, or to Harlan either—not if you want to save him from that affected Eastern way of talking. You've had enough to do with Eastern people, young man! You take care of yourself and have as little to do with 'em after this as you can manage. They may seem mighty fine and highty-tighty, and let you think it's a great thing to be *in* with 'em, but all they're after is to get something out of you; and after they've got it, they'll give you the go-by quick enough! Now I haven't got strength enough to talk very long, and I don't want to talk any more about your baby."

"All right," he said submissively. "What do you want to talk about, grandma?"

She turned her head on the pillow to look at him; and it seemed to him that her eyes were vague, as if they found him indistinct;—she frowned plaintively in an effort to see him more clearly, and was silent for a time.

"It's Dan, is it?" she said finally.

"Why, yes, grandma," he answered in surprise. "We've just been talkin' about the baby, grandma, and how much better you are and everything."

"I know," she returned with a feeble petulance. "I know what we're talking about. I wanted you to come to-night because I want to tell you something."

"Yes, grandma?"

"It's this," she said; then closed her eyes, and when she opened them, asked again: "Is it Dan?"

"Why, yes, of course, grandma! You just said——"

"*I* know what I said! I wanted to tell you—to tell you——"

"Yes, grandma," he said, and added indulgently. "Tell me anything you like to."

"I wanted to tell you not to mind," she went on. "You mustn't mind anything that happens. I mean anything I have to do with."

"No; of course," he returned without any idea of what she might mean. "Of course I won't. I won't mind it."

"You must be *sure* not to," she insisted. "You won't understand, but you mustn't let it make you feel hurt with me. You mustn't——"

"Of course I won't. Why, I'd never dream of feelin' hurt with you about anything in the world, grandma."

"Listen, Dan. I've always liked you best since you were a little boy. If you don't understand something that happens, you remember I said this, will you? What may happen is for your own good and to help you, though it may seem just the other way to you. Will you promise to remember?"

"Of course," he returned promptly; but she was not satisfied.

"No; I want you to think what you're saying. You speak too quickly to make me sure you'll remember. Say it slower, Dan. Say, 'I promise to remember.'"

"I promise to remember," he repeated slowly, to indulge this whim of hers; and then asked, "To remember what, grandma?"

"What I've just told you. That's all I have to say, Dan."

"All right, grandma;—I hope I haven't stayed long enough to tire you," he said, and patted her hand as he rose. "I expect you want to drowse a little now. Good-night, grandma."

"Good-bye," she said. And her cold and bent fingers feebly clasped his hand, giving it an impulse which he allowed it to follow until he found it resting against her cheek. "Dear boy!' she said faintly; and he was touched by this, the first caress she had given him since he was a child. She retained his hand, keeping it against her cheek a moment longer; then relinquished it gently and said "Good-bye" again.

"Not 'good-bye,' grandma," he protested heartily. "'Good-night,' not 'good-bye.' You *are* better, and the doctor himself says so. Why, by next week——"

"Next week?" she said in the faintest voice in the world and with the remotest shadow of an elfin smile to herself. "Next week? Yes. You can—you can bring the baby to see me—next week."

She just reached the end of that permission, her voice was so infinitely small and so drowsy; and her eyes closed before the last word;—she seemed to fall asleep even while she spoke. Dan tiptoed out, nodding to the nurse, who had been close at hand in the hall and came into the room as he left it.

Downstairs he found the courteous Nimbus waiting, as always, to unlatch the front door. But to-night the elderly servitor was solemn and unloquacious beyond his custom. "Goo'-ni', suh." he said. "I reckon you' grammaw 'bout ready to let that big door swing. Yes, suh. Goo'-ni', suh."

Dan walked home, wondering what door Nimbus conceived himself to be talking about, and wondering more what his grandmother had meant him to remember. But at his own door he was abruptly enlightened upon Nimbus's meaning about a "big" one. Harlan met him there and told him that the nurse had just telephoned.

Mrs. Savage would never explain what she had asked him to remember; she would never explain anything—never, forever.

CHAPTER XVII

THE day after her funeral Mr. Oliphant brought home a copy of her will and read it to his wife and their sons and daughter-in-law in the library. He read slowly, while his four auditors sat in a silence broken only once, though the document was a long one. The single interruption was a vocal sound from Dan when the bequest to himself was mentioned, an exclamation the import of which was not determinable by the others.

But before the reading Mr. Oliphant made some introductory remarks as he wiped his glasses: "The estate appeared to be 'somewhat larger than anticipated,'" he said, as Mrs. Savage's boxes in the bank's deposit vaults contained securities she had never mentioned;—she had always been "very reticent in such matters." The value of her possessions might be "estimated roughly at probably upward of eight hundred thousand dollars, in addition to her house and a small amount of other real estate." Then he took up the typewritten sheets of the will.

Mrs. Savage had always been known in the town as "pretty close"; for her early youth was of the "old-settler" days when people who failed to be thrifty might also fail to keep themselves alive; and something of this quality had the air of striving to survive her in the posthumous expression of her wishes. She had left one hundred and thirty-five dollars to each of her three elderly servants; and seven hundred and fifty dollars to every "established charitable institution of worth and merit" in the city, the "worth and merit" to be determined by her executors, those two discreet men of substance, Mr. George Rowe and Mr. John P. Johns.

Mr. Oliphant's throat seemed to trouble him when he came to the next clause, for he read it huskily, the papers trembling

slightly in his hand. The paragraph concerned Mrs. Savage's "dearly and well-beloved grandson, Daniel Oliphant" and carefully explained her reasons for making what might seem an unfair division of her property.

Inasmuch as my said grandson, Daniel, has not seen fit to avail himself of the sound advice of those more experienced, and in particular has acted directly contrary to my own counsel for his well-being, both in the conduct of his business and in other affairs, wherein I have endeavoured to assist him and offer him guidance, and although I intend this clause in no manner to reflect upon or in any way impugn his probity and honour, which have always been above reproach, I am compelled to draw the conclusion that he has not shown that discretion in the management of his affairs which would convince me that in his hands any large sum or parcel of my estate might not soon be dispersed and disappear without profit to himself. Therefore, out of regard to his welfare, as well as to my own peace of mind, and as a token only of the sincere affection I bear him, I devise and bequeath to my said grandson, Daniel Oliphant, to be paid to him in cash by my executors out of the sum remaining on deposit to my credit at the First National Bank of this city after my funeral expenses and other just debts and the above mentioned bequests shall have been paid, the sum of thirty-five hundred dollars.

It was then that the indeterminable vocal sound came from the corner where Dan sat—a sound not unlike a slight, irrepressible gasp, though not distinctly that; nor was the nature of the emotion producing it indicated by the sound itself. No one looked at Dan, and his father hastily went on with the reading.

To Mrs. Oliphant her mother had left the income to be derived from "securities to the value of two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, these securities to be held in trust for her." Mrs. Oliphant was to have the income from them during her life, but she could not sell them or give them away, though she was left at liberty to bequeath them to whom she pleased. And the rest of the estate, much the greater part of it, was left without condition—and also without de-

fining him as "dearly and well-beloved"—to her grandson, Harlan, the residuary legatee.

"Good Lord!" Harlan said loudly, and, without further explanation of his feelings, sat staring blankly at the wall opposite him.

Wiping her eyes, Mrs. Oliphant looked at Dan; and her husband also turned in that direction.

"Dan, old fellow," he began, in a distressed voice, "you mustn't think——"

But Lena interrupted him. She jumped up from her chair, and her cheeks and temples were alive with a colour that outdid all the extraneous tinting her grandmother-in-law had so hated. "This is aimed at *me!*" she cried. "I understand perfectly the real meaning of that precious document! Heaven knows why, but she must have disliked me before Dan ever brought me here! She showed spite at her first sight of me, and tried to hurt me, and did hurt me. And now she cuts us off with nothing and gives it all to Harlan just to show she thought that all I care about is money—yes, and to prove she can still injure me and insult me even after she's dead!"

But here the hot little voice was choked with anger and tears;—she ran to the door. "What *are* such people?" she sobbed, stopping there for a moment, and addressing to the upper air of the room this inquiry of passionate wonderment. "Oh, my heavens! What *are* these people I've got to spend my life among?"

Then she ran through the hall and up the stairs, sobbing more and more uncontrollably, and audible below until the vigorous action of her splendidly constructed bedroom door produced a sonorous climax, followed by instananeous silence. Dan had risen, apparently intending to follow her, but he paused as his father spoke to him.

"I believe I wouldn't, if I were you, Dan."

"Wouldn't what, sir?"

"I think I'd just let her alone to have it out with herself. I've noticed it seems to work better, she gets herself in hand sooner that way."

"Yes, sir," Dan said, and moved to depart.

"Wait just a minute. I think your mother has something she wants to say to you." Mrs. Oliphant, who was holding her handkerchief to her eyes, had made a slight gesture, which her husband thus interpreted, and Dan turned back quickly and stood before her.

"What is it, mother?"

She caught his hand and held it, speaking brokenly: "You —you mustn't think—— Mother loved you—she *did!* She—she left it so that *I* could always—always take care of you, if you—if you needed it. She didn't mean anything unkind to you."

Mr. Oliphant supplemented this. "I believe your mother's entirely right, Dan. The division may seem unfair, but I'm strongly of the opinion there was no intention to be unknid or to—or to hurt you!"

"'*Hurt* me'!" Dan exclaimed loudly. His face was aglow and his eyes were shining. "Hurt me? Why, she didn't leave *you* anything, sir, and you're not hurt. And just look what she's done for me! Why, even you and mother had begun to think I couldn't hold on to Ornaby this time, but grandma's left me not only enough to tide me over, but to go *ahead* with! I'm goin' to set out the stakes for that automobile factory to-morrow!"

He turned again toward the door as he spoke; and his father again mistook his intention. "Dan, I—I really wouldn't go up to talk to Lena just now. If we all just let her alone when she's in one of these—ah—that is, I've noticed if we keep away——"

"Yes, so have I," Dan agreed heartily. "That's not where I'm headed for, sir."

His mother had retained his hand in spite of his movement to go, and now she tried to draw him nearer her. "Stay with us, dear," she pleaded. "You're so plucky, you poor boy, but I know it *has* hurt you. I know you want to get outdoors and walk and walk and grieve to yourself, but if you'd stay with your father and me——"

"I can't," he said, and detached his hand from hers though she still sought to keep it. "I *got* to go, mother."

"But where?" she begged. "Where do you want to go at such a time as this, dear?"

"Where?" he cried triumphantly. "Why, to see those executors and get that money! I'm goin' to make George Rowe and old John P. Johns agree to advance it to me the first thing to-morrow morning. Grandma's saved Ornaby for me, God bless her!"

He waved an exultant hand over his head and departed at a long and rapid stride, leaving his father and mother to stare at one another with pathetic inquiry; but after a moment or two of this Mr. Oliphant laughed vaguely, sighed, shook his head, and raid: "Why, he *means* it!"

"You don't think he's just covering up what he feels? Pretending——"

"Pretending? No!" her husband returned. "All your mother's will means to him is that he can go on with his Addition!"

"But he can't. Thirty-five hundred dollars won't——"

"No, not long," Mr. Oliphant admitted. "But it looks like a million to him to-day, because it pulls him around this particular corner. Of course in a little while there'll be another corner that he *can't* get pulled around, but he doesn't see that one now. All he's thinking about——"

"But he expects to begin a *factory!*" she exclaimed. "I haven't a doubt he'll try to."

"Neither have I; and that'll bring the corner he can't turn just so much nearer."

"It seems so pitiful," the mother lamented. "I'll help him all I can. There's the income of what she's given me——"

"It won't go very far," Oliphant informed her, ruefully amused. "Not with the kind of plans Dan'll be making now that he's got hold of thirty-five hundred dollars!"

"Well, but then," she said brightly, yet with a little timidity, "you see, there's Harlan. Harlan could——" She hesitated; and both of them turned, though not confidently,

toward their younger son who still continued to sit motionless in his chair, in the bay window, staring at the opposite wall. He seemed unaware that they were looking at him, until his mother addressed him directly. "Harlan, you *would*, wouldn't you?"

He merged from his deep interior of thought like a man blinking in the sun after exploring a cavern. "What?"

"I said, wouldn't you——"

"Oh, yes," he interrupted. "Yes, I heard what you said, though I was thinking of something else. I wonder if either of you understand just what grandma was up to."

"It seems to be plain enough," his father said. "She'd always been a pretty sharp business woman; she was convinced that your grandfather's success was mainly due to her advice, and I expect it was, myself—anyhow a good deal of it—so she thought Dan ought to've listened to her when she opposed his putting what your grandfather left him and all he could borrow besides into this real-estate venture. I'm afraid she felt rather bitter when he went ahead with it in spite of all she said against it. So it seems pretty clear that she thought if she left him anything substantial it would all be thrown away on a scheme she thinks is bound to fail—she couldn't imagine the city's ever growing out that far—and she didn't want her money wasted. So she left it to you. I don't see anything particularly enigmatic about it, Harlan."

"No," Harlan agreed, though his dry smile was evidence that he withheld his true thought on the matter; "I suppose not. At least, there's nothing enigmatic about it to me." He was obviously not elated over his good fortune; and his mother saw fit to commend him for this.

"I think—I think it's so sweet of you, dear," she said timidly;—"I mean especially while Dan was here—your not showing any pleasure in having so much come to you. I think it's noble, Harlan."

"You do?" he asked, and he laughed briefly without any merriment. "Perhaps I'd better explain what I believe grandma really meant. She never liked me, and she always adored

Dan. It's curious, too, because Dan's disposition is like grandfather's, and she certainly never seemed to think much of grandfather! Well, she did hate Dan's throwing his money away on a wild scheme that can't possibly do anything in the end but leave him bankrupt; and she certainly understood him—she knew no matter how much he could lay his hands on, he'd pour it all in after the rest—and it's true she didn't want her money wasted that way, and knew I wouldn't let it be wasted at all, if she left it to me; but that wasn't what she really had in mind. Lord, no!"

"Wasn't it?" his father inquired gravely. "I don't see anything else."

Harlan laughed again with the same dry brevity. "She always hoped Dan would marry Martha Shelby—and she kept on hoping it, even after he married Lena."

"Harlan!" his mother protested. "You oughtn't to speak like that! Why, mother couldn't any more have thought of such a thing, when Dan was already married——"

"She died hoping it," Harlan insisted. "I tell you——"

Mr. Oliphant interrupted. "That seems to me about as far-fetched an idea as I've often heard, Harlan."

"Does it, sir? Didn't you ever hear grandmother express her opinion of Lena?"

"Somewhat frequently."

"Did you ever hear her mention her conviction that Lena was entirely mercenary and married Dan because she thought he was rich?"

"She talked that way sometimes—yes."

"And didn't Lena just show us she thinks that's what the will means, herself?"

"Possibly," Mr. Oliphant admitted. "But that doesn't prove——"

"You might just read over that document of grandma's again," Harlan suggested. "She appears to leave me everything and Dan nothing, but gives mother a very comfortable living income, and she knew mother will take care of him when he needs it. What's most significant, she provides that

mother can leave the principal to anyone she pleases. Don't you suppose grandma knew it will naturally come to Dan eventually? She's really taken care of him, and at the same time made it appear that he's cut off with this thirty-five hundred dollars that'll last him about a minute. She did it because she hoped Lena would leave him and get a divorce."

"No, no!" Mrs. Oliphant cried out. "Mother wouldn't have had such a wicked thought. She had the strictest ideas about morality I ever——"

"Yes, she did," Harlan agreed. "Yet that's just what she planned. You may not see it, but it's as plain to me as if she had written it in her will. And there's something more than that in it, too."

"What is it?" Mr. Oliphant inquired skeptically. "What is the something more that's hidden from every eye but yours?"

Harlan reddened and failed to reply at once;—then he said with a reluctant humour: "I'm afraid she's played it rather low down on me, sir."

"What!" Mr. Oliphant stared at him. "You call leaving you five or six hundred thousand dollars playing it rather low down?"

"You'd say it's a fantastic view, would you, sir?"

"Yes, I believe I should—considerably!"

"Maybe so," Harlan said. "Yet there seems some ground for it. Grandma knew—that is, I mean she thought—she thought that I had certain hopes about Martha myself, and she told me pretty plainly I'd better keep out of the way. Well, she's put me in a fine light before Martha, hasn't she? Here's Dan, all his life supposed to be the favourite, with great expectations, and now he's cut off with a shilling, and I get it all! In the eyes of a sympathetic woman who's always liked him best anyhow, isn't he the suffering hero, and don't I play the rôle of the brother that undermined him and supplanted him?"

"That's nonsense," his father said a little irritably. "You don't suppose your grandmother deliberately——"

"I don't suppose she meant unkindly by me," Harlan interrupted. "Naturally I don't suppose my grandmother made me her residuary legatee for the purpose of injuring me. Probably she thought I'd be consoled by what she was leaving me."

"Oh, Harlan!" his mother cried reproachfully.

But Harlan only smiled at her faintly and did not defend himself.

"So Lena will leave Dan now, will she?" Mr. Oliphant inquired, with satire. "And then Dan will proceed in freedom to carry out the rest of this programme?"

"No, sir; not at all."

"But haven't you just been saying——"

"I've been saying what I see in the will," Harlan explained. "I've been saying what grandma hoped, and I think she was pretty shrewd, but I believe that her dislike of Lena led her into an error. I haven't the remotest idea that Lena will leave her husband."

"I see!" Mr. Oliphant returned sharply. "You mean you haven't any fantastic ideas yourself, Harlan; it's only your grandmother who had them, though she's just left you a fortune!"

His tone was hard; and Harlan, looking at him gravely, pointed out a significance in the hardness. "There it is, sir. Already I'm a little more unpopular with you than usual, because you can't help sympathizing with Dan and feeling that I've got his share as well as my own. Don't you think other people may feel the same way?"

For a moment Mr. Oliphant looked slightly disconcerted by this bit of analysis, but, recovering himself, "Not necessarily," he replied. "I'm not criticizing you because of your inheritance, but because it doesn't seem fair in you to impute all this surreptitious planning to a person who's shown such generosity to you. You don't seem to realize——"

"Oh, but I do," Harlan interrupted. "Mother spoke of my not seeming elated and praised me for it. I don't deserve her praise. You see, if I don't feel much elated just at first it's because to my mind the whole thing is another example of

how much better grandma liked Dan and how much better other people are going to go on liking him. Naturally, I'm glad to have the money; I know she meant well by me, and I appreciate it. I appreciate another thing, too. One of the reasons she left it to me was that she knew I put what I had from grandfather into the safest type of municipal bonds. She knew that I'd understand the value of whatever she left me. She knew I'd take care of it."

He put a slight but sharp and dry emphasis upon the final words. "She knew I'd take care of it," so that there was a hint of warning in them; and he added, making this note more definite: "She was right about that, because I *will* take care of it."

Upon that, he struck both arms of his chair decisively with the palms of his hands, and, as a continuation of this action, rose and turned to the window, his back to his parents. They glanced nervously at each other, each knowing that the other had the same hope and the same doubt; the glance they exchanged meaning, "*You* speak to him about it!" Mr. Oliphant yielded and coughed uncomfortably as a prelude, but his wife impulsively decided to begin the task for him.

"Harlan, dear," she said, "your father and I both know you've always acted conscientiously in everything you've ever done; and of course what mother's given you ought to be regarded as a sacred trust. You're right to say you'll take care of it, but we feel—I mean your father and I feel!——" She faltered, and appealed to her husband: "You *do* feel that perhaps—perhaps under the circumstances—perhaps——"

"Yes," Mr. Oliphant said as she came to a helpless stop; —"I think under the circumstances Harlan might—might properly see fit to——" But here he, too, hesitated and seemed unable to continue.

Their son, however, understood them perfectly, and turned sharply to face them. "Of course I knew you'd ask it," he said, and an old bitterness, long held down within him, came to the surface. "I knew you wanted me to let Dan have even that twenty-five thousand dollars grandfather left me. You

really wanted me to let him throw it away along with his own, though you never spoke out and asked me to do it. Martha Shelby did, though. *She* spoke out plain enough! The fact that grandfather gave it to me never entered her head. She only thought I was miserly for not putting it into Dan's hands to be squandered. That's what she thought, and I've understood all along that my mother and my father had a great deal the same feeling."

"No, no," his mother protested, for the bitterness in his voice had increased as he spoke. "We never reproached you, dear."

"No, not in words maybe."

"No, not in any way," she said. "It was right of you to take care of it, and you'd be right now to take care of what you'll have. Your father and I only mean that now you have so *much*——"

"Now that I have so *much*," Harlan echoed, "I ought to throw away part of it, even though grandma's trusted me to save it from just this very wastage and to take care of every bit of it?"

"No, no; it isn't that," Mrs. Oliphant said; and with pathetically naïve artfulness she changed the basis of her appeal. "But you know, dear, you were just telling us how much Martha had wanted you to help Dan—she'd always been such a devoted friend of his—and you said that after she hears about mother's bequest to you, she may take it as a kind of supplanting your brother, and it would be harder than ever for you to make her fond of you; so don't you see—don't you see what a splendid effect it would have on her now, when you've got so much, dear, and could spare it—don't you see, if you'd—if you'd——"

"Yes, I see," Harlan said grimly. "You think Martha might even admire me enough to marry me, if I'd say to Dan: 'Here! I won't accept all this that should have been yours. Here's half of it.'"

"Oh, no," she cried, "I didn't mean half of it; I only meant you might——"

"No," Harlan said; "not *any*, mother—not a dime! I won't impress Martha with a pose. I don't want her or anybody else to like me because of a pose."

"Would it be a pose," Mr. Oliphant asked gravely, "to help your brother?"

"Wouldn't it?" Harlan returned as gravely. "Isn't it a pose to do something that isn't natural to you, simply to make a woman admire you? I'd call that a pose, myself, though you may have another definition of the word. I'm not caring to get admiration that way, sir."

"All right," his father said, nodding, as the fragile edifice of Mrs. Oliphant's gentle cunning was thus dispersed upon the air. "I should say you had the right spirit there. But why need it be an attitude? Wouldn't you really *like* to help Dan out a little, Harlan?"

Harlan sighed. "Not in a failure, sir. First and last he's had a pretty long chance to prove what he could do with his Addition, and he's no nearer succeeding to-day than he was when he began. Instead, he's lost all his money and all his time. All he's done was to spoil a farm."

"But if he had some really substantial assistance, it's not absolutely impossible he might——"

"No, sir," Harlan said definitely; "I don't believe in it, and I'll never do it. I didn't want to supplant him. I didn't ask for what grandma's done for me; I never did one thing to get it, or for the purpose of making her like me; and, as a matter of fact, she didn't do it because she liked me. But she did know I'd take care of it, and I'm going to prove she was right about that, anyhow. I won't throw any of it away on an attitude to make Martha Shelby think well of me. Of course she'll be all the surer she's right about me, now that I don't do anything for him, though I have so *much!*" He picked up the copy of Mrs. Savage's will from the table where his father had left it, and, sitting down again, prepared to look over it; but, as he placed in position the eye-glasses already necessary to him when he read, he sent a sidelong glance toward his parents, a glance in which there was the bitterness of an ancient

pain. "I wouldn't even throw any of it away to make my father and mother like me a little better, either," he said.

Mrs. Oliphant cried out reproachfully: "Oh, Harlan!" and she would have said more; but her husband shook his head at her, and she was silent. Harlan finished his reading, set the manuscript down upon the table, and went away without speaking again, so that his parents were left to themselves and a thoughtful, somewhat melancholy silence.

Mrs. Oliphant broke it diffidently. "You don't think mother ever dreamed that——"

"That he might help Dan? No; not with the Addition. Harlan's right when he says that's just what she trusted him not to do."

"I didn't mean that," Mrs. Oliphant explained. "I mean—you know what he said about mother's hoping—I mean his saying he thought mother had those wild ideas about Lena's going away and—and Martha Shelby——"

"No," her husband said. "No; I don't think so. It seems unlikely. I don't think your mother would have——"

"No," Mrs. Oliphant assented thoughtfully. "I can't believe she would. Of course there isn't any way of being sure—now."

"No; but it's probably just Harlan's imagination. He's sensitive, and that always means imaginative, too. I don't think we need to dwell on it."

"I suppose not. Especially as she *couldn't* have meant anything like that. You don't think she *could*, do you, dear?"

"No, no; I don't think so," he answered. "We'd better be worrying over other matters, I suspect."

"You mean about getting Harlan to help Dan out?"

"Yes."

"Of course I can do something," she said. "I'll help all I can with the income mother's given me; we've always managed to live very comfortably without it. But Harlan—why, I almost believe Dan could make a success of the Addition, if Harlan would do something substantial about it. Yes; we ought to be able to think of *some* way to get him to do it."

CHAPTER XVIII

THEY thought of many ways to get him to do it, but none of such ingenuity as to inspire them with confidence. Mrs. Oliphant made more suggestions than her husband did, and she put most of them into the form of little dramatic dialogues imagined as taking place between Mr. Oliphant and Harlan. Mr. Oliphant was to say such-and-such things to Harlan, who would necessarily reply in certain terms, which she sketched;—whereupon his father could triumphantly turn the words just uttered into proof that Harlan would not only be doing his duty by helping Dan, but at the same time would make great headway with Martha Shelby in a straightforward manner involving not the slightest pose.

Unfortunately, after each of these small dramas in turn, becoming eager in her opinion that "*this* time" she had "got it," she was forced into pessimism by Mr. Oliphant's pointing out that Harlan wouldn't say what she had sketched for him; but, on the contrary, was certain to express himself to an effect precisely the opposite.

Many times that afternoon the poor lady murmured, "No, I suppose perhaps it wouldn't do after all," and pondered again. "But why don't you think of a way that *would* do?" she asked, with more spirit, after one of her failures. "You're a lawyer; you ought to be able to think of *something*."

He laughed and made the gesture of a man helpless between opposing viewpoints of his own. "What provokes me is that I can't help seeing Harlan's side of it, too. There's a good deal to be said on his side, you know."

"Yes, indeed," she readily assented. "He thinks he's perfectly right; but of course he isn't."

"Well, why isn't he? After all, your mother trusted him to do just what we're planning to get him not to do."

"But her will doesn't *say* he can't help Dan. So why shouldn't he?"

"No," Mr. Oliphant interrupted; "it doesn't say he mustn't; but that's what she counted on. In our hearts we're blaming him for not betraying a trust, and for being unwilling to put money into the fire;—he honestly believes it would be putting it into the fire. And he won't do it, even though he knows his refusing makes him look mean in the eyes of pretty much everybody he cares about, even in the eyes of the person he seems to care most about. Well, there's something rather fine in a stand like that, after all."

"Martha'd never forgive him!" Mrs. Oliphant said emphatically. "Never! If he doesn't help Dan, now that he's got so *much*, she'd always believe him terribly stingy. So you see we ought to persuade him for his own good, too—if we could only think of a way."

But they continued to find that elusive way beset by baffling afterthoughts; and when Dan came home from his excursion, successful and in high fettle, they spoke to him of the subject that had been engrossing them—and were straightway baffled again. Dan even declined the proffer of future assistance from his mother.

"Not a penny!" he said. "She didn't have any faith in me, and she despised the whole idea of Ornaby. She gave me thirty-five hundred dollars of my own—bless her for it! She gave me that to do with as I please, and it's plenty. Why, tomorrow I'm goin' to fix up the interest on what's owed on the land, and then I've got to settle another little matter, and after that I——"

"Wait, Dan," his father interposed. "What other little matter is it you have to settle? I didn't know anything had been worrying you except the probable foreclosure."

"It didn't, sir. I didn't worry about this at all. I knew I could fix *it* all right, if I could just hold off the foreclosure. It seems I've never paid any of the taxes on the Addition—I've had so many other things on my mind, it seems I just kind of neglected that—and so somebody's got a tax title to it; but

now I can settle with him to-morrow morning and clear it off—and then I'm goin' to turn up some sod out there! I'm goin' to get ready to lay the foundation for my first factory!"

"But the *money*, dear!" his mother cried. "How in the world do you expect even to lay the foundations unless we can get Harlan——"

"No, ma'am! I wouldn't take a nickel of it if he begged me to! I've been pretty near where I was ready to steal to get money to pull me out of a hole; but I'll never take one single cent of what grandma left Harlan, or of what she left you either. If she'd meant me to have it she'd have given it to me herself; but she didn't have any faith in me, and she says so in plain words in her will. You don't expect me to take help from her that she wanted to *prevent*, do you? Never in this world!"

"There! You see?" Mrs. Oliphant lamented, appealing to her husband. "I knew it hurt him, in spite of what he said. I knew it!"

"You're all wrong," Dan stoutly maintained. "She kind of explained to me what she was goin' to do, though I didn't see what she meant. It was just a few minutes before she died. She told me to remember not to be hurt, but she needn't have worried about it, and I told her so. So don't *you* worry about it. I didn't begin to build Ornaby on my expectations from her; I've carried it along this far by myself, and I expect to carry it the rest of the way. And I'm goin' to build that factory! George McMillan thinks maybe he can float some of the stock for it in New York, and I don't know but he's got a little money of his own he may want to put in. The way I feel, why, it looks to me as if I was about ready to climb out on the top o' the heap right now; and I'm certainly not baby enough to be hurt because my grandmother didn't have any faith in me."

He continued to protest and perhaps protested too much; for although it was clear enough to his parents that he was so heartened by his thirty-five hundred dollars as to anticipate miracles, yet it was not to be believed that his pride had suf-

fered no injury at all. What appeared in his grandmother's will as a severe criticism of his ability and judgment was more than a mere neutral lack of faith; and Mrs. Oliphant's intuition had touched the truth; he was indeed hurt—but he never admitted it.

Moreover, he remained steadfast in refusal; he would neither allow his mother to help him with money nor countenance any appeal of hers, or his father's, to Harlan. Both of them, uncountenanced, did with faint hope reopen the subject to Harlan, though they did it indirectly;—they made allusions to the pathos of the brave and independent position his brother had taken. But Harlan only looked slightly badgered, and replied that this extolled position of Dan's was the only possible correct one under the circumstances.

From time to time the troubled parents tried other diplomacies of increasing feebleness, until finally it seemed best to mention the subject, even indirectly, no more. In the evenings the silences in the library were charged with feeling withheld from expression; though Dan enlivened the room when he came in, and made it boisterous if he brought the baby with him. Certainly no depression could be recorded against either of this pair; Henry Daniel glowed with health and became livelier with every month of increasing age and weight. As for Lena, after her outburst upon the reading of Mrs. Savage's will, she was another of this household who was surcharged with repressed feeling; but her repression became a habit;—weeks went by when she did not slam a door. She appeared to become more tolerant of her husband at this period than she had ever been; and when she spoke to him at all, it was in a tone suggesting that her tolerance had in it something of compassion.

She devoted herself to her baby, perhaps finding a refuge in her devotion; but she declined to accompany Dan on Sunday afternoons when he went for a sidewalk excursion with the perambulator. This was an established custom in the town, she observed: every Sunday, early in the afternoon, the young fathers and mothers began to appear upon the sidewalks, the

fathers pushing the baby-carriages and the mothers strolling a little way behind with the toddlers, if there were any o these, or perhaps lingering for a moment of gossip with friend encountered by the way, then scurrying on to overtake the perambulator.

High and low followed the custom; it was as well observed by the South Side, where lived most of the followers of handi crafts, as it was upon National Avenue and Amberson Boule vard. The perambulators of these two thoroughfares were the more luxurious; fine lace was to be seen upon the occupants and the accompanying parents were well dressed; though Lena, looking from her window, sometimes shivered to see one of the passing young husbands wearing a Derby hat as a complement to the long frock coat that appeared to be a regalia garment necessary to this occasion.

By four o'clock, which was Dan's favourite hour for his weekly perambulator stroll, most of the pedestrian families were on their way homeward from "Sunday dinner at grand pa's and grandma's," the grandma and grandpa being almost invariably the parents of the young mother. Lena objected to the parade as "publicly provincial," and pointed out that Dan lacked any plausible reason for joining it;—if the baby needed air he could be taken for a drive in the family carriage and if Dan insisted on pushing him in the perambulator, the Oliphants' backyard was "twice the size of Madison Square," she said with elaborate exaggeration; but Henry Daniel's father only laughed and continued to follow the custom of his fellow-townsmen.

The Sunday-afternoon excursion with the perambulator gave him his greatest happiness, and all through his bustling week days of work he looked forward to it, chuckling as he thought of it. And when the rewarding hour arrived, he went forth wheeling his son before him and cheerily unconscious that he was the only father in sight not accompanied (even at a distance) by a second parent for the occupant of the perambulator. He was proud to exhibit Henry Daniel and loved nothing better than to lift him out of the little carriage

and talk uproarious baby-talk to him, and tickle him to make him laugh, and in every other possible manner show him off to other young parents—or to anybody who had time to listen to these hilarious paternal banalities. If other parents bragged of their own young, showing them off in turn, Dan's manifestations with Henry Daniel would become but the louder; and if the other parents, being two to one, succeeded in drowning him out, he would restore his child to the perambulator tenderly and move on, sorry for people who had so little to make such a fuss about.

Sunday, he said, was the only day when he had a chance to get really acquainted with the baby; for all the rest of the week Dan was out hustling so early and so late that opportunities for making the acquaintance more intimate were few. A great part of his activity at this time was in the chase of possible buyers of Ornaby ground; and a driven life was led by those three men who had thought they might buy lots after the foreclosure. The Earl of Ornaby gave them little rest; and although he sometimes remained away from one or another of them for days at a time—perhaps upon the ardent request, "Well, for heaven's sakes can't you even give me a chance to think it *over?*"—he would write frequent letters to the pursued creature in the interval. Incessantly he persuaded, argued, and prophesied; seldom has a half-accepted, half-rejected lover shown such hot persistence in convincing his lady; and probably never have three dismal men in moderate circumstances been so urgently courted into the buying of lots.

They were not friends, these men: they had gone separately to Ornaby and had no knowledge of one another when the pursuit of them began; but they knew one another well before it was over. The vehement salesman had so quoted them to one another, making such glorifying use of their every admission not actually condemning Ornaby, that a conference of the quoted seemed to be a necessity. They thought to meet in secret; but within ten minutes found the hunter upon them.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you wish to be alone, and I will

not interrupt you"—and talked until two of them went home.

He went with them, and then returned to talk some more to the man at whose house the conference had been called.

Such deadly persistence finally prevailed upon a majority of the three and two more lots were sold in the Addition upon the liberal terms of nothing down and little more than nothing to be paid in periodical instalments. Nevertheless, here were three actual sales, and if there ever lived a salesman who knew how to make three appear to be a hundred, because he himself believed three to be a hundred, that multi-visioned salesman was Daniel Oliphant.

In a day of quieter art certain academicians now gone from their academies had frequently the desire to paint pretty young women blue-robed and poised as if alighting from the air. Sometimes, upon the lower part of his canvas, beneath the poising lady's alighting toe, such a painter would twirl a golden circle, then swathe her eyes with a blue kerchief and name the picture, "Dame Fortune on her Wheel." The effect was of the dame blind, but dancing; and sometimes the course of events in the life of a human creature will warrant the conception, yet it has usually been observed that Fortune seldom dances to one who has not diligently begged the favour. It would seem the blinded lady has a little bit of her kerchief up.

The man who had built a picnic shack at Ornaby for his large family found his wife and children so reluctant to come home from the picnics that he enlarged the shack, put a cooking-stove and cots in it, and began to stay there from Saturday afternoon until Monday morning. His house was far down in the city where the smoke had begun to discourage his wife, and, in the unavailing struggle to keep things clean, she grew querulous. "If we could only *live* out here!" she wailed one day when they were at the shack; and this outcry produced the first house in Ornaby Addition. It was a cottage of the "New Colonial" kind; and Dan drove all of his other Ornaby boosters to see every new phase of its construction,

from the digging of the cellar to the polishing of the floors; for when the cottage was begun the purchasers of land in the Addition were increased in number to eight. By the time the cottage was finished there were fourteen, and several of these intended to build "right the first minute next spring," Dan said.

He called them his "Ornaby boosters"; for he readily adopted the new vocabulary of commercial argot then being developed by "promoters," by writers of advertisements, and by New York hustlers for trade. "Every Ornaby buyer is an Ornaby booster," he said one day, when the new cottages in the Addition had brought him new buyers of lots; and, falling instantly in love with the cadence of this alliteration, went straight to the billboard men. Thereafter no one could go northward of the city for an afternoon drive and fail to find the gentle landscape wrecked. On every road the earl blazoned his great defacements: "Every Ornaby Buyer is an Ornaby Booster!"

At home he had two subjects, both subdivided. One was Henry Daniel, his growth, his wit, and his precocity; and the other was Ornaby Addition, its present magnificence and prospective splendour.

"And the queer thing is," Harlan told Martha Shelby, "he believes every word of it. He actually still believes he's making a success of that dreadful place. Isn't it strange?"

But Martha said that she knew something stranger, and when he asked her what it was, she answered: "Why, it's your still believing he *isn't* making a success of the 'dreadful place.'"

CHAPTER XIX

HARLAN laughed ruefully and told her that time, tide, and travel failed to alter her. "You don't change as much as—as much as"—he looked about him for a comparison, and found one ready to hand in the material of which the Shelbys' veranda was made. "You don't change as much as this Western limestone does. It's made of stone, too, but years and weather take its edges off and give it the look of being not so hard as it used to be."

Not defending herself from the criticism, she gazed thoughtfully at Harlan as he sat fanning himself with his straw hat—he was warm and flushed after their walk on this hot June morning—then she turned her eyes again to the wide lawn stretching before her down to the National Avenue sidewalk. Looking out from the shade of the veranda, her eyes needed the shelter of the curved fingers of her hand, a protection she gave them, resting her elbow on the stone railing beside her. The trimmed grass of the lawn was a blazing green, seen waveringly through visible pulsations of the heated air; the fountain swan, still diligent under every discouragement, sprayed forth no skyward rainbow mists, but ejected a limpid rod of water of so brief an uplift that the bird seemed to carry in his throat the curved tip of a shepherd's crook made of glass. The asphalt street, beyond the shade of its bordering maples, lay steaming and smelled of tar;—drooping bicyclists rode there, tinkling their little bells for a right of way. Surreys and phaetons gave them courteous passage, and frequently a swifter, noisier vehicle went by, grinding, squawking, and leaving blue oil-smoke on the air.

There were many more automobiles than when she had last gone away, Martha noticed; yet the outlook from the veranda was the old familiar one. To her eyes, however, it bore the familiar unfamiliar appearance that well-known things bear to

the traveller at home again, but not yet quite adjusted after a long absence. For this was not her return from the little run she had made to England at the time of the baby's christening next door, though that excursion was itself a longer one—much to her taste—than she had planned. The bit of old hickory serving her as a father resisted stiffly, but finally proved flexible under great pressure, and she took him even to Russia before she got through bending him. When his protestive squeakings at last became unbearable, she brought him home, but did not remain herself. In the Italian Alps there was a valley town with which she had fallen in love;—she returned to her native land merely as an escort for Mr. Shelby, and, having deposited him safely, hurried back to the terraced vineyards, the whitewashed walls with strings of red peppers dangling against them, and the frescoed old villa she had rented in the foreground of this picture.

It was a commonplace, she said, that the new twentieth century was the age of the annihilation of distances; people talked from New York to Chicago over a wire; the Atlantic was crossed in six days, the American continent in four; and her father could remember when it took him three weeks to get to Philadelphia; he "wouldn't mind being taken care of by correspondence."

Old Hickory, well-warranted in his outburst, replied that he didn't "need any takin' care of, thank you"—he was tired of being bossed to death, and he wanted her to understand she was mighty welcome to go and stay as long as she had a mind to! If she remained at home, he wouldn't know when she might be draggin' him off again without his exactly knowin' how it happened. It was "curious," he continued; he had sense enough never to let her interfere with him in his business; but in other matters he never knew when he might-n't find himself in some dog-gone place he didn't *want* to be in—at a plague-taken pink tea maybe, or even right spang in the middle of Europe in some heaven-forsaken garlic heap, with nothin' to think about but old dead monks and nothin' to do but hate the smell. If Martha liked hangin' around those

old worn-out nations that never showed a sign o' life except advertisin' chocolate and keepin' their fertilizer right under their front parlour window for fear somebody'd steal it, why, she was certainly good and welcome to all she wanted of 'em! For himself, he had his business to 'tend to; and he didn't want any aunt Ella to pester him, either; "aunt Ella" being his widowed sister, whom Martha had proposed as a housekeeper in substitute for herself. He was full and able—thank you again!—to get up in the morning and eat his ham and eggs without somebody's pinning a bib around his neck, and he believed he knew how to wash and go to bed at night without any fussy woman fixin' up his bureau every other day, so as to hide his nightshirts from him! Altogether, he was lookin' forward to a little rest and liberty, thank you!

So Martha had gone with his earnest consent; for his complaint of her did not lack reason—she was headstrong and a compelling daughter—and she stayed until she had her fill of Italy for that while. Meantime, the abandoned father contentedly lived alone, except for his negro servants, and declared that at last he was his own man and began to feel as if he owned his own house; he felt that way for the first time since his daughter was born, he said. But a different view of his condition was maintained by a member of the household next door.

"A fine exhibition of filial duty!" Lena cried, in one of the irritated moods that returned upon her as the growing Henry Daniel began to be a little boy instead of a little baby. When he was a noisy little boy during the day his mother often became reminiscent, not happily, by the time his father came home in the evening. "You told me once she had a heart as big as she was," Lena went on. "It looks like it, doesn't it? Leaving that poor old man alone over there, month after month and year after year!"

Dan listened absently, his mind on a new customer for a lot. "Who you talkin' about now?"

"You know! That big girl of yours."

"Martha?" he said, his tone a weary one instantly. "How

often have I told you she never was any girl of mine, big or little? What's started you on *that* again?"

"I shouldn't think you'd expect it would take much to start me," Lena exclaimed, "when you remember you gave me your sacred promise I should have a year in Europe——"

"Oh, Lordy! Have we got to go all over that again?"

"—And when you remember you deliberately broke your word to me," Lena went on, "and haven't ever even made the slightest effort to keep it! You hold me here, suffocating in this place, year after year——"

"Now, see here," he interrupted; "just think a minute, please! Is that fair? Haven't you been back to New York every year for at least two or three——"

But Lena almost shouted her interruption. "Yes! Two or three *weeks!* To visit my *family!* Do you think it means happiness for me to be with *them?*—and all of 'em watching to see how I take care of my baby! Is that keeping your word to take me abroad? Oh," she cried, with bitter laughter, "doesn't it seem ironical even to you? That big creature next door was so jealous of me because I had what she wanted she couldn't bear to stay where she had to look at it, so she goes away and gets what *I* wanted! *Isn't* it ironical, Dan? Don't you see it at all?"

"I see you've got your imagination all stirred up again, that's all."

"Imagination!" she cried. "Yes; I should think my imagination *would* get 'all stirred up'! Why, it's funny! She can go and take what I want, but it can't be any good to her; she hasn't culture enough to see it or to feel it or to hear it. I can see her carrying that accent around Europe, and asking waiters for 'ice wat-urr' and 'please to pass the but-urr'! Yet she can go and I can't!"

"But *I* didn't send her," Dan explained, since his wif clearly implied his responsibility. "You talk as if I——"

"No; but you had no right not to send *me* after giving your sacred——"

Dan interrupted her genially; he smiled and pat

pretty little shoulder, though it twitched away from his touch. "Lena, look here: I've got some big deals on, and I'm just about certain they're goin' to work out the right way. You see up to now the trouble's been that all the money comin' in had to be put right out again almost before I'd get hold of it. If it hadn't been for that, I'd had that factory up and running long ago. But as I look ahead now, everything is mighty good—*mighty* good! If I can just put these deals through——"

"Yes; it's always 'if,'" she reminded him. "When have I ever talked to you that you weren't just about to put through some 'mighty big deals'? You said exactly the same last year."

"Well, but this is a better year than last year. Why, I've done twice the business—yes, better'n that; it's more like four times what I did last year. If Ornaby keeps on like this, why, a few years from now——"

She stopped him; informing him that she'd long since heard more than enough about "a few years from now"; whereupon, being full of the subject, he went down to the library to tell his father and mother what was inevitable within a few years. No skepticism dampened his library prophecies now; Harlan was no longer there to listen, staring with dry incredulity through his glasses.

Harlan had not sold Mrs. Savage's old house, but had moved into it, and kept as precise a routine there as she had kept, and with the same servants. He had two bedrooms upstairs made into a library, but changed nothing on the lower floor; and often the old lady seemed still to be there in authority. At twilight, before Nimbus lit the electric table lamp in the "south front parlour," the room to which she had always descended from her afternoon nap, it was not difficult to imagine that she was sitting in the stiff chair beside the plate-glass window. Of course Nimbus believed that he saw her there when he came in to light the lamp; and he often mumbled to her—always upon the same theme. He was grateful for the one hundred and thirty-five dollars she had left him, but considered the sum inadequate.

"No'm, indeed," he said to the figure he saw in the stiff chair. "I thank you kindly, but didn't I used you right all my days? How much it cost you slip down ten hunderd thirty-five on that paper, 'stead of one hunderd thirty-five? *You* ain't got it, are you? Ain't doin' *you* no good, do it? No'm, indeedy! 'Tain't no use you bein' sorry, neither. Make all the fuss you want to; you too late; nobody ain't goin' pay no 'tention to you!"

And in the kitchen he would discuss the apparition with his fourth wife, the fat cook, Myrtle. "Look to me like she can't keep away," he would say. "Set there same as ever. Set up straight in that stiff chair. See her plain as I see you, till I git that lamp lit."

"Landy me, Nimbus, I wouldn't go in that room unlessen the light bright as day if you give me trottin' horse an' gole harniss! How you keep from hollerin'?"

At this the tall, thin old fellow would laugh without making a sound; deep wrinkles in the design of half of a symmetrical cobweb appearing on each side of his face. Some profoundly interior secret of his might have been betrayed, it seemed, if he had allowed his merriment to become vocal; and this noiseless laugh of his awed his wife in much the same way, no doubt, that the laugh of a jungle witch-doctor ancestor of his had awed wives not unlike Myrtle. "She ain't goin' bother me ner you," he explained. "She ain't settin' there 'count o' me ner you. She settin' there 'cause she so mad."

"Who? Who she mad at?"

"Mad at somep'm!" Nimbus would say, and, becoming less uncomfortably mystic, might allow a human chuckle to esca[pe] him. "Set there mad long as she want to; 'tain't goin' do[] no good. She ain't *fixed* to make no changes now!"

The new owner lived in the old house almost as qu[iet] Mrs. Savage, in the visions of Nimbus, went on livi[ng] Harlan had several times thought of going to Ita[ly] idea never culminated in action.

"I wanted to come, though," he told Marth[a] on her veranda that hot morning, the day a[fter]

"I wanted to more than I ever wanted to do anything else. You see I've almost stopped going to the office; I just dangle about there sometimes to please father, but I don't care to practise law. It's a silly way of spending one's life after all, fighting the sordid disputes of squabbling people. There was really nothing to keep me here."

She did not alter her attitude, but still looked out upon the old familiar unfamiliar scene from beneath her sheltering curved fingers. "If you wanted to come, why didn't you?"

"Because I'd only have done it to see you, and I suppose I have a remnant of pride. If you'd like a better answer, think of what I told you about yourself. I didn't come because I know you're stony. I knew you hadn't changed."

"About what?"

"About me," he said, and added: "About anything!"

At this she turned her head and looked at him, for he spoke with a sour significance. "Well, have you changed, Harlan?" she asked gravely.

"About you," he answered. "I haven't—unfortunately."

"But I meant: Have *you* changed about anything? Aren't you just what you were five or six years ago, only a little intensified—and richer?"

"Ah, I knew I'd get that," he said. "I knew it would come before I could be with you long. I told my father and mother the very day my grandmother's will was read that you'd hate me for it, and mother agreed quickly enough."

"Why, no," Martha said, and her surprise was genuine. "Why should I hate you because Mrs. Savage——"

"Because she left it to me and not to Dan, and because I n't think I was right or sensible to help him with any of

he hasn't needed any help," Martha said. "It's much r him to be doing it without any help, and so splen-

didly?" Harlan repeated, and he stared at her. 't take what Dan says seriously, do you? You just because he says——"

"I haven't seen him, Harlan."

"But you speak as if you believe he's actually succeeding in making that old fantasia of his into a reality."

"Well," she said, "isn't he?"

"What? Why, he's still just barely keeping his head above water. He sells vacant lots out there, yes—but to keep on selling them he has to put all they sell for into developing the land he hasn't sold. It amounts precisely to the same thing as giving the property away. His mortgages used to worry him to death, but he's got most of the place mortgaged now for three times what it was five years ago. You see——"

"I see that the land must be worth three times as much as it was five years ago, since he can borrow three times as much on it."

"But, my dear Martha——"

"But, my dear Harlan!" she echoed mockingly, and thus disposed of his argument before he could deliver it. "The truth is, you've had the habit of undervaluing Dan so long that you can't get over it. You can't see that at last he's begun to make a success of his 'fantasia.' Given time enough, critics who aren't careful to keep themselves humble-minded always lose the power to see things as they are."

Harlan winced a little under this sententious assault, and laughed at himself for wincing; then explained his rather painful laughter. "It's almost amusing to me to find myself still cowering away from your humble-minded criticisms of me—just as I used to, Martha!"

"Yes, I know it," she admitted. "I hate myself for the way I talk to you, Harlan;—somehow you always make me sm and superior. I'm the foolish kind of person who's alw made critical by superior criticism—critical of the cri mean."

"But I'm not more critical of Dan than other p Have you asked your father what he thinks of O for instance?"

"Yes, I asked him last night."

"What does he think of it?"

"He thinks the same as I do," she said. "He's been compelled to recognize that it's going to be a tremendous success."

"Then he's changed his mind since last week," Harlan returned, somewhat discomfited. "He told me——"

"Oh, yes, I know," she said. "He didn't say he thought it would be a success. He said he thought the Addition idea was just as crazy as he ever did, and Dan Oliphant was the biggest fool in seven states, and the noisiest! Those were his words precisely, Harlan."

"But you just told me——"

"No," she explained;—"you asked me what he *thought*. Do you suppose he'd admit to me that he ever made a business mistake? He knows perfectly well that he did make one when he refused to follow my advice and buy some of Dan's stock when the poor boy was trying to finance his plan at the beginning. Papa confessed it absolutely."

"He did?"

"Certainly," she replied. "If he'd meant what he said he'd just have grunted it. Instead, he yelled it at me. With papa, that's exactly the same as a perfectly open confession."

Harlan shook his head, remaining more than doubtful of this interpretation. "So you believe if Dan tried now to organize a stock company for Ornaby——"

"They'd gobble it!" she said. "Papa especially! But he and others like him wouldn't buy a single share when poor Dan went begging and peddling all over town; and now I'm glad they didn't. It's so much better for him to have done it lone."

"But, my dear," Harlan insisted, not altogether without peration, "he *hasn't* done it."

y dear," she returned promptly; "he's *going* to!"

Martha——"

," she said. "I'll tell you something that you don't because you've been living here all along. When college, I spent the Christmas holidays visiting irls, and papa didn't see me for a whole year. fainted—I'd grown so! Yet I'd grown just

as much the year before, but he never noticed it because I was living at home where he saw me every day. It's the same way with a city like this, Harlan. I haven't been here for so long that I can see the change. Everything is going to happen that Dan prophesied."

She had spoken with gravity, but Harlan laughed, not impressed. "Yes, the boosters brag of the increase in population shown by the last census," he said. "We've got a few thousand more Italians and Polish Jews and negroes, I suppose; and some new ugly factories and dwelling-houses of objectionable architecture. They're beginning to build awful little shacks they call 'bungalows,' hurrying them up by the dozen. Is that the glorious cosmopolis of your hero's prophecies, Martha? To my mind it's only an extension of hideousness, and down where I live, in my grandmother's old house, it's getting so smoky in winter that the air is noxious—the whole town's dirty, for that matter."

"Yes," she said. "Yesterday, as soon as I got here, I noticed that even in summer the air's smokier than it used to be. I think the city was a cleaner place and a better-looking place when I went away. There's the smoke, of course, and I've already seen how they're beginning to tear old buildings down and put up bigger ones, and no building has any thought of having the slightest relation to the ones on each side of it. In a way, as you say, it's getting hideous, though some of these long, wide streets are pleasant, even to a person who's stayed in Europe too long perhaps—and National Avenue is really beautiful. I don't know where except in towns like this you'll find a long street of such big, solid, comfortable houses with green trees and clean lawns about them. This part of the town, at least, hasn't changed; but a change has begun, and I believe it's the growth—I think it's the incredible growth that Dan predicted, Harlan. I think it's begun."

Again she had spoken gravely, though with a glinting look at him which had in it some hint of triumph, and piqued him.

"Well, if this fabulous growth *has* begun," he said incau-

tiously, "you're surely not hero-worshipper enough to think it's going to extend as far as Ornaby Addition, are you?"

She had hoped for this, had led him into it. "Papa's going to begin building an extension of the Tennessee Avenue car line next month," she said. "I forced him to admit how far out it would run."

"Not so far as the Addition?"

"Within an eighth of a mile of it," said Martha. "That's what made him so noisy!"

CHAPTER XX

HARLAN was astonished, but he took his little defeat well; and Martha in turn encountered a surprise, for he showed a discomfited kind of pleasure. "So Ornaby Addition's going to get its rapid transit at last," he said. "That's not so bad, you know. Why, Dan might come out pretty well on the thing after all!"

"But doesn't that annoy you, Harlan?" she asked.

"You mean that I *want* to see my brother beaten? That I really haven't good will toward him?"

"No, indeed I don't. I mean: Wouldn't it annoy you to find you'd always been mistaken about him?"

"But I'm not. I grew up in the same house with him, and I ought to know him. If he does happen to do anything with his wild old idea after all, it'll be by the grace of a series of miracles no one could possibly have foreseen."

"That is to say," Martha observed, "you'd call him 'a fool for luck.'"

"Let's put it, I *hope* he is."

"And you were just telling me *I* didn't change!" she cried.

"Yes," he returned placidly;—"it seems we're neither of us wiser than we used to be. We sit here talking of Dan and his Addition just as we'd have been talking about them if you'd never been away. You really ought to be speaking with a slight foreign accent and unable to put your mind on anything later than the seventeenth century."

She nodded, agreeing. "Yes, it's queer; and it makes me *feel* a little queer. You go away and stay for ever and ever; then you come back home and by the time your trunk's unpacked you're ready to wonder if you've been away at all;—maybe you've just had a long dream. Of course, too, I knew what was going on at home—right through papa!—but some

of the girls of our old set here have been faithful about writing, in spite of their every single one of 'em getting married. That makes me feel I belong to the seventeenth century—almost '*cinquecento*'!"

"I'd prefer the '*cinquecento*,'" Harlan said, and immediately added: "Not that I care for it myself."

"What!" she cried, her eyes widening. "You'd even criticize the Renaissance?"

It appeared that he would, and willingly. Offhand he called the Renaissance "a naïve movement amusingly overrated and with the single merit that it was better than what had gone before." Martha was indignant, and they had an argument in which she proved to be no match for him. He had not been abroad since his junior vacation as an undergraduate, but he knew a great deal more about Italy than she did, though she had just come from long residence there. She continued to disagree with him, and presently was surprised by the suspicion that she enjoyed hearing him talk, and in a way, found him congenial in spite of their differences.

"You're the only person I ever heard of that criticized the Renaissance," she said, when he got up to go. "You're all wrong, of course, even if I can't prove it. You're too much for me, but that's only because you're such an admirable bookworm."

Then, as he went down the long path to the gate, she observed that his shoulders had acquired a little more habitual stoop in them than she remembered. Otherwise the tall figure might have been that of a thin athlete; and Harlan had a well-shaped head;—she was readily able to comprehend what one of her friends had written her of him: "And Harlan Oliphant seems to be just as sarcastic as he used to be, but he *is* awfully distinguished-looking as he grows older." Nevertheless, even in this view of his back, Martha found something irritating, something consciously aristocratic, over-fastidious, skeptical, and precise. "That's just what you are!" she said half-aloud, before she turned to go into the house. "You can be rather

fascinating, but you're really only an admirable bookworm in a nice, clean white collar!"

The admirable bookworm, unconscious that the definition of him had been enlarged, walked down National Avenue, keeping within the continuous shade of the big maple trees and perplexing himself with introspections as he went. He was dry and cold as he knew, yet far from incapable of ardour, and he had never entirely lost the ardour he felt for Martha; but what surprised him was the renewed liveliness of that ancient pain she evoked within him. He had thought it dead, but evidently it had only fallen into a doze in her absence.

Of course he asked himself why he should ache because she had at once resumed with him her old critical attitude, and why, moreover, he should care about her at all. She had almost no coquetry and little more of the quality called "sheer feminine charm"; she was too downright and plain-minded to possess much of either. She was not masculine, yet, as her father said with the plaintive irascibility of a man who knows because he has suffered, she was imperious. "A man might as well be dead as bossed to death," he often complained. And although she was a handsome creature and graceful, Harlan saw a dozen prettier girls at the new Country Club every day that he played golf there. Notwithstanding all this, she had only to let him see her again after years of absence, and at once his heart leaped, then ached, and he could think of nothing but this Martha who thought so little of himself.

He was not the only member of his family who found Martha's return disturbing; his sister-in-law also had long thoughts connected with the arrival from Italy. That evening before dinner, Dan was whistling in his bathroom, shampooing himself lavishly, when Lena came into his bedroom and addressed him through the open door.

"I suppose you've seen her," she said, and gave utterance to an emotional little titter that quickly stopped his whistling.

He had heard such semblances of amusement from her often enough to understand their prophetic meaning. "In for it again!" was instantly his thought. "Seen her?" he said. "Who do you mean?"

"Your fair mountain range," Lena replied, affecting a light mockery. "Of course you didn't know she's home again! Innocent old Dannie!"

"I heard she was to get here to-day, so I suppose she's here; but I haven't seen her. What about it?"

"Oh, nothing!" Lena returned, continuing her archness. "Do you suppose she can stand it?"

"Stand what?"

"Why, the sight of us—of her old sweetheart married to me," Lena explained. "She's stayed away till she thought she could bear it, but do you suppose she *will* be able to?"

"Yes, I think she'll bear it," he said gruffly, and went on with his lathering.

"How about you? Do you think *you'll* be able to contain yourself when you——"

"I expect so."

"Why don't you ask me how she looks?" Lena inquired, still affecting to rally him gaily. "I know you're dying to. I've seen her; I was looking from my window and saw her go out and walk up the street this afternoon. I laughed so!"

"What about?"

"She was such a perfect picture of a big Western woman! Absolutely typical!"

"You mean like mother, for instance?"

"No; your mother's a dear thing who'd be lovely anywhere; I never think of her as Western at all," Lena said. "She isn't."

"She is as much as Martha is—or anybody else. She was born here and——"

"Not at all!" Lena interrupted airily. "The real Western woman is like your mountain girl. They *love* to be huge; that's why they live in the prairie country—so they'll look even bigger. One reason I laughed was because your friend was just exactly as much the typical Western woman after

all this time abroad as she was before she went. She was wearing all kinds of expensive clothes, and I haven't a doubt she'd got them in Paris, but on her they looked perfectly as Western as if she'd just bought 'em and put 'em on downtown at Kohn & Sons! Do you suppose you'll be able to control your raptures at all when you meet her again, old innocent Dannie?"

"See here," he said, "I wish you'd let me get fixed for dinner. I had a pretty hot day's work and I'd like to——"

"Of course you would!" Lena said. "You'd like to make yourself beautiful because you're going to hurry over there to her just as soon as you've finished your dinner, aren't you? That's what you have been planning, isn't it?"

"Why, yes; certainly," he answered. "I'd like to have you go with me. She's an old friend of mine and all our family; she's been away a long time, and it wouldn't look very cordial not to——"

"Why, no; so it wouldn't!" Lena mocked, but now her mockery was openly acrid. "It wouldn't look *cordial* and naturally you'd hate to have her think you lacked cordiality —a woman you were so cordial with you wanted your child to grow up to be like her instead of like its mother!—a woman you were so cordial with you had to hold her hand the very day you brought your bride home! It would be *terrible* to have her think——"

But here Dan closed the door, though not so sharply as Lena closed the outer door of his bedroom when she went out of it an instant later.

The subject of Martha's return was not again mentioned directly during the evening; and after dinner, when Lena with arch significance inquired of her silent husband why he had settled down at the library table to write business letters when there was "so much to do in the neighbourhood," Dan replied, without looking up, that his letters were important— he'd have to beg to be excused from talking. Lena picked up a book, and retired to the easy-chair and the lamp in the bay window, which had once been Harlan's favourite reading

place; but she did not read. She sat looking steadily at her husband—as he thoroughly and uncomfortably understood, though he kept doggedly at his writing.

After a time his mother and father were heard in the hall, going out; and he knew that they were "going over next door" to bid Martha welcome home. They had not mentioned where they were going, and he understood the significance of their not mentioning it—and so did Lena, as she sat watching him. He wondered why he did not rise and say to her: "There's an old friend of mine next door; I haven't seen her for years; I ought to go over and tell her I'm glad she's home, and I want to! There's no reason I shouldn't, and you can make the most of it—I'm going!"

Lena had her own wonderings. She wondered why she was keeping her husband from going. Her thought was that she ought to say: "I don't think I care for you enough any more to have a right to be jealous. Go to your old friend and tell her you're glad she's home again, since you wish to. I'm not so small about it as I'm making you think, and I really don't care."

Lena wondered why she did not say this to her husband;—in a manner she wanted to say it, and at the same time she knew that she would say nothing of the kind, but on the contrary, intended to keep him in fear of what she might do if he made any effort to appear "cordial," as he had said, to Martha. Thus the husband and wife sat—the husband bent over his writing and the wife looking at him, her book in her lap. When she looked away from him it was not to the book that her gaze went, but to the wall across the room, where she saw nothing to please her; and when she had looked at the wall for a time she always looked again at Dan. His own eyes were kept to the writing upon the table, yet he must have been conscious of hers when they were upon him, for a deeper frown came upon his forehead whenever she looked away from the wall and again at him.

After a while Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant were heard returning, and in the library it somehow seemed strange, and like an

event out of nature's order, to hear such brisk and cheerful sounds, when the front door opened, letting in the two voices and their owners simultaneously.

"Indeed she *is!*" Mrs. Oliphant was heard to say, while her husband continued a narrative evidently begun outside.

"And I told her so. I said, 'By George, if an old maid's a person who just gets lovelier and lovelier, Martha, why, then, maybe you're——'"

But here his voice so abruptly dropped to a mumble no one could have doubted that the suppression was in obedience to a tactful gesture of his wife's; nor was it difficult to picture this gesture as a movement of Mrs. Oliphant's hand toward the open door of the library. Immediately afterward the two were heard ascending the stairs; the house again became as quiet as before; Dan went on with his writing, and Lena with her looking and wondering.

Often such a vigil between husband and wife does not end by leaving things as they were before it began. Between the two silent people appear to have taken place communications so imperceptible that neither is definitely aware of them, yet each may be affected by them as if by words spoken. It would seem that there is a danger here; for with couples not well wedded the unspoken words may be too true, or may carry altogether too much revelation. Lena stopped wondering; and then rather slowly it became clear to her that she and her husband no longer cared for each other at all. Long, long she had clung to her belief that she was still in love with him; and now all she had left to her of this was that she could still be jealous of him. "A fine reason for not leaving a man!" she said to herself;—especially a man who really cared about nothing but his business and his boy!

Suddenly she rose from her chair, the book in her lap falling to the floor where she let it remain; and then she stood still, while Dan glanced up inquiringly from his work and met the strange, examining, hostile look she gave him.

There was a final moment of silence between them before Lena hurried across the room and left him. A minute later

Dan rubbed his forehead, wondering again. Upstairs, Lena had not slammed her door.

He had an absent-minded impression that something had happened, but as its nature seemed indefinite, and he had now become more interested in his letters than in Martha's return or Lena's temper, he bent again to his work and kept at it with zest until after midnight.

CHAPTER XXI

DAN did not go next day to bid the returned neighbour welcome home—he thought it better to postpone the call of greeting he should have made at once. He knew he should have made it, if even out of no more than mere neighbourliness; but gradually it became postponed into the indefiniteness that means never, a postponement not without parallel when old friends of husbands return. Meanwhile. Martha was not again mentioned by either Lena or her husband; though this is only to say that she was not orally mentioned between them, but continued to be the subject of their silences. Dan did not dare to go to see her; and his own silence, when he was with his wife, was doggedly protestive, while Lena's was inscrutable, though she sometimes gave him evidences of a faintly amused contempt. She permitted him to perceive that she despised him, but not to understand whether she despised him because he wanted to see Martha or because he was afraid to do what he wanted.

Once or twice, when he came from his long day's work, he caught a glimpse of a white figure in the twilight of the Shelbys' veranda, and waved his hat, and thought a hand waved to him in return; but weeks passed and limp midsummer was almost upon the town before he had speech again with the slighted lady, though the slight was always upon his conscience.

Upon a hot Sunday noon, when his father and mother returned from church, he took them to see the "carpenter shop" he had spent the morning making in the old summer-house for young Henry—Henry Daniel no longer, at the boy's own vehement request. The grandparents praised the "carpenter shop" but chided their son for staying away from church to construct it, and their grandson for missing Sunday-school. Dan laughed; he had not been to church in a year; and Henry

distorted the cherubic rotundities of his small face into as much ferocity as he could accomplish. "I hate Sunday-school," he declared; and, as his mother joined them just then, he seized her hand. "I don't *haf* to go 'lessen I want to. You'll never get *me* in that ole hole again!"

"My gracious!" Dan laughed. "It isn't as bad as all that. You and I *might* decide to begin goin' again sometime, Henry."

"I won't," Henry said stoutly, and as the group moved across the lawn, returning toward the house, he clung to his mother's hand and repeated that he didn't "haf to." He appealed to Lena piercingly: "I *don't* haf to if I don't want to, *do* I, mamma?"

"Why, no," his father assured him. "Of course you don't. It wouldn't do you much good, I expect, if you don't like it. You needn't fret, Henry. I guess you'll be a good enough boy without Sunday-school."

"I expect so, maybe," Mr. Oliphant agreed, chuckling at his grandson's vehemence. "It's a good thing your grandmother Savage can't hear you, though, Dan. I never did know what she really believed; in fact, I rather suspect she was an agnostic in her heart—but she'd have been shocked to hear you letting your offspring out of Sunday-school—or anything else—merely because he doesn't like it."

"I expect she would, sir," Dan said. "But all that's changed since her day. People don't believe in——" He stopped speaking and moving simultaneously, and stood staring out at the sidewalk where his brother and Martha Shelby, walking slowly, were returning from church.

"People don't believe in what?" Mr. Oliphant inquired, stopping also.

"I—I don't know, sir," Dan said vaguely, and he began to grow red. Harlan and Martha had turned in at the gate and were coming across the lawn to them.

Martha went first to Lena. "I haven't had a chance to say 'Howdy-do' to you since I came back," she said easily. "I'm ever so glad to see you again." Then she turned to Dan, and

gave him her hand with a cordial emphasis of gesture. "It's fine to see you again, too, Dan. I want to congratulate you about Ornaby Addition. You'll have to look out, though."

"I will?" Dan said and added awkwardly, "Well—well, the —the truth is, I'm mighty glad to see you. I mean we're all glad you're back home again, Martha." He was visibly in a state of that almost certain contagion, embarrassment, and so flounderingly that he was embarrassing. He dropped Martha's cordial hand almost as soon as he touched it, and at the same instant turned upon his wife a look of helpless apprehension that would have revealed everything, if revelation were needed. But Lena showed herself as little disconcerted as the steady Martha was; and the look she sent back to her husband held in it something of the hostile examination that had come into her eyes on the evening after Martha's return, though now it was accompanied by a bright glint almost hilariously jeering. It was strikingly successful in effect. Dan gulped, then he stammered: "How—how do you—how do you mean I must look out, Martha?"

She laughed cheerfully. "I mean you must look out for some of those wicked old men downtown. You tried to get them to come in with you at the start, but they wouldn't, and pretty soon they're going to be furious that they let the chance slip. They'll try to get Ornaby away from you, Dan." She turned to the little boy, who had been silenced for a moment by the arrival of this stranger. "I ought to know you," she said. "That's why I stopped on my way home: I wanted to meet you. I live next door. Will you shake hands?"

"No," Henry replied, because his momentary shyness had passed and he felt that this refusal would help to restore the conspicuousness he had been enjoying as the owner of a new "carpenter shop" and a rebel against Sunday-school. "I don't want to. I don't want to shake hands."

"Why, Henry dear!" Mrs. Oliphant intervened, touching her grandson lightly upon the shoulder. "You don't mean that! This is our dear friend that lives next door and *likes* little boys. You must——"

"I won't!" Henry shouted. "I don't care who she likes, I don't want to shake hands." He intended no discourtesy; he merely wished to be distinguished, and in continuance of that desire immediately doubled himself, placing the top of his head upon the ground. "I can turn a summerset," he said. "Want to see me do it? Watch me! Look!"

He failed to accomplish the proposed feat, but at once attempted it again. "*Watch* me!" he shouted. "Look at *me!* Why don't you *watch* me?"

He went on with his attempts, more and more shrilly demanding the public attention that had wandered from him. Martha had begun to talk to Mrs. Oliphant; and Lena came close to Harlan for a moment. "Didn't leave her accent in Italy!" she murmured in her little voice; and passed on toward the house, displaying daintily upon the short grass pretty white slippers that a girl of twelve might have worn.

Harlan shrugged his shoulders, and his thought was, "Parisian doll!" as it usually was when his sister-in-law irritated him. Certainly, if there were a Parisienne present it was Lena and not the unchanging Martha in her Paris clothes.

The little boy shouted louder and louder, since attention was still denied him;—he tugged at his father's coat, wailing shrilly, "Look at *me*, papa! Oh, my goodness, can't you *watch* me?"

Meanwhile Martha, beaming down upon Mrs. Oliphant, nevertheless sent an impersonal glance over that amiable lady's head to where the child thus besieged his father, who seemed to be in a temporary stupor. Dan looked much older, Martha thought, than when she had gone away; and, though she had not expected him to retain forever an unlined face and his fine figure, she felt a little dismay at finding him settling into what was strikingly like middle-age. He was older and heavier than he need have been, she thought, and a stranger might well have guessed Harlan to be ten years the younger of the two.

Nowhere in Dan, with his broadened, preoccupied, and lined face, his heavy, careless figure and his middle-aged care-

less clothes, could she discover the jolly boy she had known, or the youth she had danced with in college holidays, or the jaunty young man so dashingly clad who had come home from New York engaged to be married, and told her so on a February walk she would always remember. What was more to her, nowhere in this almost middle-aged man of business, now beginning to be successful, could she discover signs of the spirit that once would have brought him instantly to welcome home an old friend, even if a wife did threaten. Yet he was a man who would have swept Lena aside if she had attempted to interfere with his business, Martha thought—and it was not a thought that made her happier. She moved to depart.

But at this, the insistent Henry, irritated beyond measure by the general indifference to his acrobatics, flung himself upon her, pulling fiercely at her dress. "My good*nuss!* Can't you *watch* me? What's the *matter* with you? You *got* to watch me!"

There was a sound of tearing as he pulled at her:—Mr. Oliphant sprang to him and removed him, but Martha picked up the lace flounce partly torn from her skirt, and laughed at the mutilation of her finery. "No harm at all," she said, as both Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant began to apologize for Henry; but their apologies and her reassurances were not distinctly audible; nor were her words of departure as she turned toward the gate with Harlan. Henry had instantly squirmed from his grandfather's grasp and was shriller and louder than ever.

"*Now* I guess you'll watch me!" he shrieked. "Look at *me*, gran'pa! Look at *me*, everybody!" He appealed also to his mother, who had paused near the front steps and stood there, laughing. "Look at *me*, mamma! Watch me, now! I'm goin' to turn a summerset!" He charged into his father's legs, yelling, "You're not lookin' at *me*, papa! My good*nuss!* Can't you *watch* me?" And he continued to be overwhelmingly vociferous, but Dan, for the moment, paid no attention.

He was wondering how it had happened that Martha had been so long at home and he had not taken the few steps—

just to next door—to tell her he was glad she had come back. What if Lena had made a fuss? It would have been right to go. And there came to him faintly, faintly, the ghost of a recollection of a starry night when he and Martha stood not far from where they were now in this glaring noon. It had strangely seemed to him then that he had had a gift from her, something made of no earthly stuff, something enriching and ineffable. He had forgotten it; but now he remembered, and at the very moment of remembering, it seemed to him that the gift was gone.

He stared blankly at her as she passed through the open gateway, holding her torn dress and chatting with Harlan; while against Dan's legs the vehement Henry was battering himself and shrieking, "Look at *me*, papa! My good*nuss! Can't* you look at *me!*"

Dan consented, and when Martha and Harlan entered the Shelbys' gate, beyond, they saw that the acrobat, still piercingly vociferous, had collected the attention of all of his audience but one. His mother still stood near the stone front steps, laughing, not looking at him; but his grandparents and his father were applauding him. He was insatiable, however, keeping them in the hot sun while he performed other athletic feats. "You *sha'n't* go in the house, gran'ma!" he screamed. "I'm goin' to hop on one leg all across the yard. You got to watch me. You *watch* me, gran'ma!"

Mrs. Oliphant obediently returned, and the new entertainment began.

"Isn't it awful?" Harlan groaned. "Isn't it dismaying to think what children are coming to nowadays? I'd hoped you'd let me sit on the veranda a little while with you, Martha; but I can't ask you to stay out in an air made hideous by all this squawking and squealing."

"Then you might come in with me," she laughed. "Our walls are pretty thick."

The walls of the big old house were as she said, but open windows brought the shrill, incessant "Watch me!" indoors, and the annoyed Harlan complained further of his nephew.

"It makes one respect the Chinese," he said. "They at least pay some attention to ancestors. Only certain tribes biologically very low worship children, I understand; but that seems to be our most prevalent American habit to-day. We're deliberately making this the age of the abject worship of children—and I wish my grandmother could have lived to give her opinion of it!"

"What do you think she'd say, Harlan?"

"Isn't hard to guess! She'd have said we're heading the children straight for perdition. In fact, she thought that about our own generation; she thought father and mother were heading Dan and me that way; yet we were under heavy discipline compared to the way this terrible little Henry's being brought up. Lena's family were severe with her, I understand, and she doesn't believe in discipline. As for Dan, he's always been just the child's slave."

Martha looked compassionate. "Yes," she said slowly. "I suppose he had to have something he could worship."

"Well, he's got Ornaby Addition," Harlan suggested dryly.

"No. He had to have something besides. I think he'd have worshipped his wife, if she had ever let him, but I suppose she——"

"No," Harlan said, breaking the indefinite pause into which Martha had absently strayed. "But she's always capable of being jealous." And he looked at Martha from the side of his eye.

"Jealous of me?"

"You've certainly been made well enough aware of it from the very day he brought her home, Martha."

"Oh, yes," she assented cheerfully. "She's never doubted that I've always cared for Dan, but she knows that he wasn't in love with me. She must have always been sure of that, because—well, here I was—he had only to step over next door and ask me, but he asked her, instead. And yet, as you say, she disliked me from the start. She certainly saw I wasn't the sort to take him away from her, even if I'd thought I could—and I knew I couldn't. Yet it's true she was jealous.

Do you know what I think really made her so, Harlan? I think almost the principal reason was because I'm so tall."

"What?"

"Yes, I do believe it," Martha insisted. "Someone told me she used to be called 'French doll' in New York, and was very sensitive about it. She wanted to be thought a temperamental and romantic opera heroine, and would never stand near a tall woman because she was afraid of being made to look more like a French doll. I think she couldn't endure the thought of her husband's having a woman friend as big as I am."

"No doubt she's never wanted to be near you herself," Harlan said. "But I think her feeling isn't quite so much on the physical plane as that."

"Oh, yes, it was. A man mightn't understand it, but——"

"A man might, though," he interrupted. "Lena's always been afraid that you're just what she'd call the type of big Western woman Dan ought to have married in order to be happy."

"What?" Martha cried, but her colour deepened, and there was agitation in her voice, though she laughed. "Why, what nonsense!"

"Is it?" Harlan said, and now agitation became evident in his own voice, though he controlled it manfully. "It's what I've always been afraid of, myself."

"No, no!" she cried, her colour still deepening. "That's just nonsense!"

"Is it?" he repeated grimly. "My grandmother Savage didn't think so. She cut Dan off with a shilling because she hoped Lena would leave him and give him a chance to marry you—eventually!"

"Harlan Oliphant! What on earth are you talking about?"

"I think you understand me," he said. "Grandmother was a shrewd old lady, and as good a judge of character as one often sees; but sometimes she overshot the mark, as most of us do, no doubt, when we think we understand other people so thoroughly that we can manipulate their destinies. She

thought a good deal that was true about Lena; but she despised her too much, and made the mistake of thinking her purely mercenary. That's why I was the residuary legatee, Martha."

"Of all the nonsense!" she protested, and continued to protest. She'd never heard anything so far-fetched in all her life, she declared—people didn't put such Machiavellian subtleties into their wills; and Harlan was a creative romanticist instead of the critic she'd always believed him to be. But his romancing wasn't successful; it was too incredible.

He listened, skeptically marking the difference between the vehemence of the words she used and the lack of conviction in the voice that uttered them. "Never mind, Martha," he said at last. "I see you believe it and agree with me."

"I don't," she still protested; but her tone was now so feeble that it only proved her determined never to make the open admission of what she denied. "It would be too tragic."

"Why?"

"To think of that poor old woman——"

"Yes," he agreed. "I'm afraid it must irritate her now if she knows."

"To think of her——" Martha said. "Poor thing! I mean it would be too tragic to think of her hoping and planning such—such preposterousness!"

At this Harlan looked at her so sharply, so gravely, that he seemed to ask much more than appeared upon the surface of his question: "But would it be preposterous? Suppose Lena and Dan should——"

"Separate?" she said, as he stopped at the word. "They never will."

"But I asked you, if they should?"

Martha shook her head, smiling faintly; and she looked away from him—far away, it seemed—as she spoke. "People don't stay ardently in love forever, Harlan. I don't suppose anybody stays in love with anybody—forever. I think I used to believe I'd always be in love with Dan, and in a way that was true—whatever is left in me of the girl I used to be will

always be in love with the boy he used to be. But I don't know where that boy is any more. Do you understand?"

Harlan looked melancholy, as he nodded. "I suppose so."

"I mean I'm true to my memory of him, perhaps. I'm afraid I don't know just what I do mean."

"I'm afraid I do, though," he said, "I'm afraid it's only that you're hurt with him because Lena frightened him into keeping from even stepping over here for a minute to say, 'Welcome home.'"

"No; it didn't hurt—not exactly," she returned. "But he does seem changed." She frowned. "Do you think he's lost something, Harlan? Is it something—something fine about him—that's lost? It seems to me—it seems to me there must be. How could anybody expect a man to go through such a struggle for success as the one he's been through and not bear the marks of it? Or maybe is it only his youthfulness he's lost?"

"I don't see anything missing," Harlan replied. "He's certainly not lost his optimistic oratory; he can still out-talk any man in town on the subject of Our Glorious Future. In fact, I think he's even more that way than he used to be. Years ago he may have shown a few very faint traces of having been through a university, but you could sandpaper him to powder now and not find them: I don't believe he could translate the first sentence of Cæsar, or '*Arma, virumque cano*'! The only things he ever talks about are his business and his boy and local politics. I think that's all he *can* talk about."

"Whereas," Martha said, with a flash of the old championing, "the learned Mr. Harlan Oliphant has only to open his mouth in order to destroy a lonely woman's whole joy in the Italian Renaissance."

He lifted his hands, protesting, then dropped them in despair. "So I've lost it already!" he said. "And lost it in the old, old way!"

"Lost what?"

"Hope," he explained. "You see I'm years and years older

than Freddie Oliphant, and he was complaining to me the other day;—he's now considered so much 'one of the older men' that some of the pretty young things one sees at the Country Club were leaving him out of their festivities. You see where that puts *me*. So I hoped that when you came home——"

"Yes?"

"Well, I hoped that maybe you and I shouldn't quarrel any more, and——"

"Quarrel? No; we mustn't, indeed!" she said. "What else is there left for left-overs to do but to make the best of each other?"

"Nothing else, I'm afraid."

"And I'd hoped," he went on a little nervously;—"I'd hoped maybe you'd let me see you a good deal—that you'd let me take you places and——"

"Good gracious!" Martha cried; and she laughed and blushed. "Haven't you just taken me to church? Aren't you already taking me places, Harlan?"

CHAPTER XXII

MARTHA had said that Dan's remaining away "didn't hurt—not exactly"; and by this she meant to give Harlan the impression that she was less than hurt; but such a denial, thus qualified, means in truth more than hurt. She was a "big Western woman," but she could be sensitive, and had her resentments and her smallnesses. Perhaps she was not quite genuinely sorry to believe that the old friend who neglected to bid her welcome home had begun to look almost middle-aged and seemed to have lost something fine that he had possessed in his youth. There were characteristic possessions of his that he had not lost, however; he had even acquired more of them, as she discovered one evening a few weeks after the Sunday noon when little Henry tore her dress.

Mr. Shelby had come home from his office in a state of irritability, which he made audible even before he entered the house; and from her windows upstairs she heard him denouncing his old negro driver. There had been a thunderstorm earlier in the afternoon, but that was no excuse—"not a dog-gone *bit* of excuse!" Mr. Shelby declared—for a carriage to be "all so sploshed-over with mud that a decent man'd be ashamed to get caught dead in it!" And he seemed to resent the fat old servitor's wheezy explanation that the mud was the work of a malevolent motor car. "Cain't go nowhur them automob'les ain' goin' to git you these days. I had my carri'ge all spick-an'-span. Automob'le come zimmin' by jes' as we turn onto the avenoo. 'Splickety-splick-splash!' she say, an' *zoosh!* jes' look at my nice clean carri'ge solid mud! No, suh, Mist' Shelby; I had my carri'ge all wash up fresh. Nasty ole automob'le spoil ev'ything! No, suh, I——"

"Gee-mun-nent-ly!" Martha heard her father exclaim. "What you tryin' to do? *Talk* me to death? I already heard

enough talk in my office for one day, thank you! By Cripey, you stop that eternal gab o' yours and get those horses into the barn and sponge their mouths out! Hear me?"

He came into the house and could be heard muttering snappishly to himself on the stairway, as he ascended to his room to "wash his face and hands for dinner." But at the table he proved that soap and water were ineffective, at least to remove bitterness from a face; and he found fault with everything. The most unbearable of his troubles finally appeared to be put upon him by the salt, which the humidity of the weather had affected. "I s'pose this is the way you keep house in Italy!" he said. "Nothin' but smell and deggeredation over there anyway—they prob'ly don't care whether they can get salt out o' their saltcellars or not. But in this country, in a decent man's house, he'd like to see at least one saltcellar on his table that'd *work!*"

"It's apt to be like that in hot weather after a rain," Martha returned placidly. "What went wrong at the office this afternoon, papa?"

"Nothin'!" he said fiercely. "What's my office got to do with wet salt? Why can't you ever learn to keep some connection between your thoughts? Geemunently!"

"So you had a good day, did you, papa?"

"It would 'a' been," he replied angrily, "if it hadn't been for a fool friend o' yours!"

"Somebody I'm responsible for?" she inquired with a genial sarcasm that exasperated him into attempted mockery—for when he was angriest with her he would repeat something she said, and, to point the burlesque, would speak in a tinny and whining falsetto which he seemed to believe was a crushing imitation of his daughter's voice. "'Somebody I'm responsible for?'" he squeaked, using this form of reprisal now. "No; it ain't somebody you're responsible for!" Here he fell back upon downright ferocity. "Doggone him! Somebody *better* be responsible for him!"

At this Martha made a good guess. "Dan Oliphant!"

"Yes, ma'am! And I came within just one o' throwin' him

out o' my office! Stood up there and grinned at me in front o' my own desk and told me what I had to do! What I *had* to do!"

"And *do* you have to, papa?" she asked.

"What!"

"I only wondered——"

"Why, plague take him, I never saw the beat of it!" he went on, disregarding her. "Walked right into my office and told me I had to run my car line all the way across his Addition. Told me I *had* to! I told him we *were* goin' almost to the edge of it and that'd be every last speck o' the way we'd move until he does the right thing."

"Until he does what 'right thing,' papa?"

"Until he quits bein' a hog!" the old man returned violently. "He seems to think the best men in this town got nothin' on earth to do but spend their time buildin' up his property for him and makin' it more valuable, all for *his* benefit. I told him when he was ready to act like a decent man and reorganize his holdings with a good trust company's advice, and issue stock, and let somebody else *in*, we might talk to him and not before."

"What did Dan say?"

"Said he tried to get us in at the start, and now we could go plum *to !* Said I'd put that car line through there whether I wanted to or not. Threatened me with a petition of his lot owners, and said they were liable to go before the legislature and get my charter annulled, if I didn't do it."

"Was he angry, papa?"

"Angry? No!" Mr. Shelby vociferated. "What in continental did *he* have to be angry about? *I* was the one that was angry. He stood up there and laughed and bragged about what he was goin' to do till you'd thought he'd bust with the gas of it! Why, Great Geemunently!—you'd thought this whole city's got nothin' to do but turn in and run around doin' what Ornaby Addition says it's got to! I says, 'Yes!' I says. 'So from now on the tail's goin' to wag the dog, is it?'

'I don't know but it might,' he says. 'This town's done considerable laughin' at me,' he says. 'I expect it's about time I did some laughin' myself,' he says. 'You'll have to look out for your charter, Mr. Shelby,' he says."

Martha ventured to continue her naïveté, and unfortunately carried it too far. "And *will* you have to look out for it, papa?" she asked gently.

With his thin but hard old fist he struck the table a blow that jarred the china and jingled the silver. "Haven't you got any *sense?*" he shouted. "I'll show him who he's talkin' to! There's a *few* men left in this town that'll teach him a little before he gets through with 'em! I'm not the only one he thinks he can lay down the law to." He glared at her, his small gray face flushing with his increased anger. "Are *you* still standin' up for him after the way he's treated you?"

This took Martha's breath, and for an instant she was at a loss. Never before had her father seemed to notice how she was "treated"—by anybody. "I don't know what you—I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Don't you?" he returned sharply, and, before the bright stare of his angry eyes, her own troubled gaze fell. "You say you don't know what I mean?"

"Why—no. Not—not at all," she murmured.

"Well, *I* do!" And with a brief shot of breath between his almost closed lips, he further expressed an emotion that remained enigmatic to her. He rose. "Seems to me it's about time you quit standin' up for him," he said; and stalked out of the room, leaving her still at the table.

She sat there in an attitude of some rigidity after she had heard him go upstairs, and she continued to sit there, though she had finished her dinner before he departed. The conclusion she reached in her thoughts was that there was a question she would never ask him;—she would never ask him what he had meant by that final remark of his. She hoped he meant only that her pride ought to resent a neighbour's failure to come to say he was glad to see her at home again—

but she feared her father meant more than this. She feared he meant much more, and she so feared it that she would never dare to ask him.

Yet she wondered why she wouldn't dare. How could it ever be "about time" for her to stop standing up for an old friend? And when Harlan was announced to her, as she sat alone at the table, she rose with a little sigh. She did not sigh because she was sorry he had come; it was because she had just realized how much more his brother was still the heart of her thoughts than was this faithful and constant escort.

For she and Harlan had already fallen into a relation not uncommon among those she had spoken of as "left-overs": a relation that becomes a habit—a habit that in turn becomes a relation. She "went everywhere" with him; and continued to go everywhere with him; and so, after a while, their contemporaries, all married, never sent an invitation to one without including the other. Then, as time went on, and the habit continued and continued, it became common stock in the prattle of more dashing and precipitous younger people. When talk languished and even weather stencils failed to cover a blank, those who felt such covering a necessity could always fall back on this, and wonder why the two didn't "get married and be done with it."

In that manner a worn woman-of-the-world, aged twenty, complained to Frederic Oliphant one evening at the Country Club, as he sat with her after unsuccessfully attempting an imported dance he found himself too old to learn. "You aren't too old to learn it, if you wouldn't insist on being too polite to hold a girl as tight as these boys do," the woman-of-the-world informed him with the new frankness then becoming fashionable. "You aren't as old as your cousin Harlan. Why on earth don't he and Miss Shelby get married and be done with it? They've certainly been just the same as engaged for almost as long as I can remember. Everybody says they *must* be engaged—by this time! They say she used to be in love with his brother. I don't see how anybody could be in love with *him!*"

She glanced through an archway, near by, to where Dan and his wife and Martha and Harlan and a dozen other people were gravely straggling out of the dining-room; all of this party having the air of concluding a festival that had not proved too hilarious. Dan, in particular, appeared to have thought the occasion a solemn one. He had been placed next to Martha; and she remarked cheerfully that it was the first time he had been so near her "in ages." After that, however, she found little more to say to him, since he seemed to encounter certain definite difficulties in saying anything to her in return.

"I *am* coming in to—to call, some evening," he stammered, laughing uncomfortably to express his cordiality. "I'd have been to see you—I'd have been over oftener, except——" He paused, then concluded his ill-fated excuses hurriedly—"except I'm so busy these days." And he glanced uneasily across the table to where Lena sat smiling mysteriously at him.

Martha thought it tactful, and the part of a true friend, to talk to Harlan, who sat next to her on the other side.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW in the world did that cunning little wife of his ever fall in love with him?" Frederic's companion inquired, watching the emerging procession of the dining party. "He always looks as if he had something else on his mind when he's with women—as if he didn't think they're worth talkin' to. She looks about half his age. Of course you can't tell, though, everybody uses so much make-up nowadays. They say she belongs to awf'ly important people in New York and never liked it here because she couldn't get enough music. You didn't answer my question: Aren't they ever goin' to get married? I mean your cousin Harlan and that big Miss Shelby. How in the world do they find anything to *say* to each other? Gosh, if I kept a man hangin' on that long I'd certainly be talked out! How in the world can two people *stand* seein' each other all the time like that?"

"I can comprehend the gentleman's half of it," said the gallant Frederic. "I believe Miss Shelby goes abroad for a few months now and then to make her own share of the association more endurable."

Martha had been at home only a week, in fact, after one of these excursions; though she did not make them for the reason set forth by Frederic Oliphant, who was now much given to the reading of eighteenth-century French memoirs and the polishing of his diction. She went, she airily explained to Harlan, to gather materials that would enable her to defend the Renaissance; but as he drove home with her from the dinner at the Country Club, this evening, he observed that the materials she had gathered impressed him as "about as deep into the twentieth century as mechanics and upholsterers were able to go." His allusion was to the expensive closed car she had brought from Paris;—her old bit of

hickory, impossible to be bent an atom's width in business, yielded with no more than a faint squeak when his daughter was lavish with herself. "Spend what you plague-taken want to," he said, "so long as you don't ask *me* to ride in the devilish contrapshun!"

"He says he'll stick to his horses and our old carriage until they're 'chased off the road,'" Martha told Harlan, on this homeward drive. "It doesn't seem to me that's so far ahead. Why hasn't Dan ever done anything about the motor-car factory he was going to build?"

"He has," Harlan said, and laughed. "In talk he has, that is! He's been talking about it for years, almost as much as he has about Ornaby."

"Then why doesn't he——"

"Still dancing on the tight rope!" Harlan laughed. "He's got his car line through the Addition—I understand your father explodes completely whenever it's mentioned to him—but Dan's spending fortunes on new streets and sewers and what not. He's actually trying to open a big tract still farther out, north of Ornaby; and I don't believe he's able to keep money in his hands long enough to go into building cars. You'd *think* he's building them though, if you'd listen to him! He talks about the 'Ornaby Car' to everybody; I suppose he believes it's a lucky name. He *has* got his Addition booming though—no question. He's making the countryside more and more horrible every day. It's much worse than it was last year."

"How is it horrible?"

"I could tell you, but it's ten to one that if I merely told you, you'd become Ornaby's defender—you're so everlastingly its defender! I'd rather show you, if you'd take me as a passenger in this jewelled palanquin of yours to-morrow."

Martha assented, and the next afternoon her neat young mechanic drove them northward over the road once travelled on a hot and threatening morning by a "rubber-tired runabout" in which sat a disappointed little bride and a perplexed bridegroom. On that dusty morning, already of the

long ago, the way had soon become rustic; the cedar-block paving, itself worn and jolty, had stopped short not much more than a mile from its beginning; then came macadam, but not for long; and then the rough country road, leading north between the great flat fields of corn and wheat to where it became a slough in winter, and tall grass and even ironweed grew between the ruts in summer—for there it reached the soggy and tangled groves of Ornaby.

But on this brisk autumn afternoon, the crystal and enamel of the silent French car went glistening serenely along a level white way of asphalt. The fields, above which the troubled bride and groom had seen rising the clouds of the summer storm, were fields no longer; for here was bungalow-land, acres and acres of bungalows, with brick groceries and drug-stores at some of the street corners, and two or three wooden church spires slenderly asserting their right to look down on all the rest. Cross streets gave glimpses of trolley cars on other north-and-south thoroughfares; great brick school-houses, unbearably plain, were to be seen, and a few apartment buildings, not made more beautiful by pinchbeck torturing of their façades.

"Of course Dan has no responsibility for this particular awfulness," Harlan explained. "Without rime or reason the town just decided to grow, and luckily for him it's grown faster out this northern way than it has in any other direction. Some people seem to think he performed an enchantment to make it do it, but it just happened."

"It seems to happen faster and faster," Martha observed. "The last time I drove out this far was in our old carriage with papa, not quite a year ago, I think; and there were dozens of vacant lots; but now there are hardly any. The asphalt wasn't finished clear into Ornaby then, though Dan had built a fine road through. I suppose now——"

"Oh, yes; now he's got asphalt on his cross streets, too; and the southern part of Ornaby is so like this you couldn't tell when you get into it, if it weren't for the disasters he calls his signboards. Look at that!"

As they spoke the swift car had brought them into a region where there was more vacant ground; and the little houses, nearly all of wood, were not so closely crowded. On a stretch of weedy land, rising slightly above new cement sidewalks, there smote the eye a painted wooden wall two hundred feet long. With enormous yellow words on a black background the thing not only staggered the vision of a passer-by, but seemed to bellow in his ear: "You Are Now Entering Ornaby Addition! Build a Home in Ornaby the Beautiful! Every Ornaby Buyer is an Ornaby Booster."

Beyond came a region of more bungalows: "Homes Beautiful of Ornaby the Beautiful" another bellowing signboard declared them to be; and, not blushing in the very presence of the dwellings and dwellers it thus made proclamation for, went on to insist once more upon the enthusiasm necessarily a consequence in the bosom of anyone who became an "Ornaby Buyer." There was a briskness about the place: children went busily roller-skating over the new sidewalks; clotheslines were flying their Monday white pennants on the breeze; other bungalows were noisily getting themselves built, and farther on were some white cottages;—"quite pretty," Martha said they were. Beyond them the open spaces were broader, and the little houses more infrequent; but the asphalt street went on, with numbered white posts marking the building lots, paved cross streets running to right and left into thicket-bordered distances, and Dan's great signboards shouting along the front of untouched acres of old forest.

"You see for yourself," Harlan said. "This *was* beautiful before 'Ornaby the Beautiful' insulted the landscape. But now, with all these flimsy and dreadful bungalows and the signboards screeching at the trees——"

"Yes," she interrupted, "but he's spared all the trees he could, even back there, where the bungalows and little houses were so thick. And I noticed the people were planting shrubberies and trying to make little gardens grow. It might be really very pretty some day. And just here——"

"Oh, here," Harlan said, "where he hasn't touched it yet, it's well enough, of course. But you'll find it's only a question of time till he spoils it, though I understand he intends this to be what he calls a 'restricted residence district.'"

The paved street ran between tall woods now; the numbered lots were broad, and the car passed a few proudly marked "Sold." Then Martha noticed one that was several hundred feet wide, and in depth extended indefinitely into a grove of magnificent beech trees. Stone pillars gave entrance upon a partly completed driveway that disappeared round an evergreen thicket, not long planted. "What a pleasant place to live! It's getting so smoky in town it seems to me people will have to be moving out even this far some day. Whose place is that?"

"Dan's," Harlan said, with his dry laugh. "At least he says he plans to build there sometime. I don't think Lena cares about it much! I heard her speaking of it as 'out at the end of Nowhere.' One of the interesting things about my sister-in-law, to me, is the fact that she's really never wanted a house of her own. She's never once proposed such a thing in all this time, I believe, but goes on living with father and mother; and year after year passes without altering that air of hers of being only temporarily marooned in what she still calls 'the West.'"

Martha looked serious, but said nothing, and he spoke to the chauffeur, who turned westward at the next cross street. At the end of a block it ceased to be a street and became a newly gravelled road, a transformation that interested Harlan. "Funny!" he said. "I was out this way a couple of months ago and this was a dirt road with a good deal of grass on it. Now he's had it gravelled. It leads over to the west side of his land, where he laid out the site for his factory, years ago. I thought you might like to see that."

But before they approached the site of Dan's factory, they passed a long line of trucks and wagons bound their way; wagon after wagon laden with bricks, and truck loads of

lumber, of drainage tile, of steel girders and of cement, and there were great-wheeled carriers of stone. As they came closer they saw that many two-story double-houses for workmen and their families were being built on both sides of the road; and, beyond these, long lines of brick walls were rising, broken into regular open oblongs where the ample glass of a modern factory building was to be set.

"By George!" Harlan exclaimed, surprised almost to the point of dismay. "He *is* going it! Why, he's got the thing half up!" And he said, "By George!" again, seeing the figure of his brother on a section of roof and outlined against the sky. "There he is—and in his element!"

"You mean in the sky?" Martha asked, her eyes brightening.

"No; I mean hustling. Keeping everybody on the jump while he defaces the landscape some more! That's his element, isn't it?"

Dan was indeed in that element and it was truly his. He could be seen waving his arms at the workmen; shouting to foremen; running along the roof and calling to teamsters, instructing them where to dump their loads. His voice was audible to the occupants of the French car that stopped for a few moments in the road; and they became aware that he addressed the workmen, both white and coloured, by their first names or their nicknames exclusively; his shoutings were all to "Jim" or "Mike" or "Shorty" or "Tony" or "Gumbo."

A moment after the car stopped, a smaller figure climbed up the slope of the low roof and joined the towering and bulky one on the ridge. "He's got my charming-mannered nephew with him," Harlan said. "What time he can spare from spoiling the landscape he puts into spoiling Henry!"

"Is that Henry?" Martha asked incredulously; then, as she saw Dan put his right arm about the boy's shoulder, guarding him carefully from a misstep, she replied to herself, "Yes, it really is. Gracious, how time runs away from us!"

Turning to shout at someone in their direction, Dan saw

them, and waved his free arm cordially in greeting; but he made no motion as if to descend, and went on immediately with his shouting to the men. Martha said, "We'll go now," to the chauffeur; and the car instantly moved forward.

She leaned back, smiling. "He's in his glory," she said. "It all goes on arriving, Harlan. His great days have come!"

CHAPTER XXIV

SHE was right; the growth was now visibly upon the pleasant and substantial town, where all had once appeared to be so settled and so finished; for, just as with some of man's disorders that develop slowly, at first merely hinting in mild prophetic symptoms, then becoming more sinister, and attacking one member after another until the whole body writhes and alters, so it is with this disorder that comes racking the Midland towns through distortions and turmoil into the vaster likenesses of cities: haphazard and insignificant destructions begin casually, but gradually grow more sweeping and more violent until the victim town becomes aware of great crashings;—and then lies choking in a cloud of dust and smoke wherein huge new excrescences appear.

Cameras of the new age sometimes record upon strips of moving film the slow life of a plant from the seed to the blossoming of its flower; and then there is thrown upon the screen a picture in which time is so quickened that the plant is seen in the very motions of its growth, twisting itself out of the ground and stretching and swelling to its maturity, all within a few minutes. So might a film record be made of the new growth bringing to full life a quiet and elderly Midland town; but the picture would be dumbfounding. Cyclone, earthquake, and miracle would seem to stalk hand-in-hand upon the screen; thunder and avalanche should play in the orchestra pit.

In such a picture, block after block of heavy old mansions would be seen to topple; row on row of stout buildings would vanish almost simultaneously; families would be shown in flight, carrying away their goods with them from houses about to crumble; miles of tall trees would be uprooted; the earth would gape, opening in great holes and long chasms;

—the very streets would unskin themselves and twist in agony; every landmark would fly dispersed in powder upon the wind, and all old-established things disappear.

Such a picture would be but the truth with time condensed;—that is to say, the truth made like a man's recollection of events—and yet it would not be like the truth as the truth appeared to Daniel Oliphant and the other men who made the growth, nor like their subsequent memories. For these men saw, not the destruction, but only the city they were building; and they shouted their worship of that vision and were exultant in the uproar. They shouted as each new skyscraper rose swimming through the vast drifts of smoke, and shouted again as the plain, clean, old business streets collapsed and the magnificent and dirty new ones climbed above the ruins. They shouted when business went sweeping outward from its centre, tearing away the houses where people had lived contentedly for so long; and they shouted again as the new factory suburbs marched upon the countryside, far and wide, and the colossal black plumes of new chimneys went undulating off into a perpetual smoke-mist, so that the distant level plain seemed to be a plain surrounding not a city, but an ever-fuming volcano.

Once again, in the interminably cycling repetition of the new displacing the old, then becoming the old and being displaced in turn, an old order was perishing. The "New Materialism" that had begun to grow with the renewed growing of the country after the Civil War, and staggered under the Panic of '73, but recovered, and went on growing egregiously, had become an old materialism now. It had done great things and little things. Amongst the latter, it had furnished Europe with a caricature type of the American—the "successful American business man." On the shelf, beside the figure of the loud-tweeded Boxing Briton with his "side whiskers," Europe set the lank-and-drawling, chin-bearded, palace-buying Boaster of the Almighty Dollar, the Yankee of the great boom period.

That had been a great railroad-making and railroad-break-

ing period; the great steel period; the great oil period; the great electric-invention period; the great Barnum-and-Bunkum period; the period of "corrupt senators"; of reform; and of skyscrapers thirty stories high. All this was old now, routed by a newer and more gorgeous materialism. The old had still its disciplines for the young and its general appearance of piety; bad children were still whipped sometimes, and the people of best reputation played no games on Sunday, but went to church and seemed to believe in God and the Bible with almost the faith of their fathers. But many of these people went down with their falling houses; a new society, swarming upward above the old surfaces, became dominant. It began to breed, among other things, a new critic who attacked every faith, and offered, instead of mysteries, full knowledge of all creation as merely a bit of easily comprehended mechanics. And in addition to discovering the secret of the universe, the new society discovered golf, communism, the movies, and the turkey trot; it spread the great American cocktail over the whole world, abolished horses, and produced buildings fifty stories high.

. . . The slow beginnings of the new growth in the town had been imperceptible except to a few exuberant dreamers —the most persistent somnambulist of whom was Dan Oliphant—but now that the motion was daily more visible to all men, there was no stopping it. Hard times and prosperity were all one to it;—it marched, and so did its chief herald and those who went shouting before it with him, while the "old conservative business men," the Shelbys and Rowes and John P. Johnses, sat shaking their heads and muttering "Gamblers!"

Gamblers, or destroying angels, or prophets, whatever they were, they went trampling forward in thunder and dust. The great Sheridan, of the Trust Company and the Pump Works, had joined them. Unscrupulous and noisiest of the noisy, he was like a war band drumming and brassily trumpeting with the vanguard. There was Eugene Morgan who had begun building the "Morgan Car" when automobiles were

a joke, and now puffed forth from his long lanes of shops black smoke that trailed off unendingly to the horizon that it dimmed. Pendleton, of the new "Pendleton Tractor," marched with these, and old Sam Kohn and Sol Kohn and Sam Kohn, Junior—the Kohns were tearing down the Amberson Block, the very centre and business temple of the old town, the corner of National Avenue and First Street—and there were the Rosenberg Brothers, apartment builders who would buy and obliterate half-a-dozen solid old houses at a time. There were the Schmidts, the Reillys, the younger Johnsons, third generation of the old firm of Abner Johnson's Sons, and there were the Caldinis, the Comiskeys, and the Hensels, as well as all the never-resting optimists who had come to the town from farms and villages to blast it into nothingness and build their own city and build themselves into it.

In the din of all the tearing down and building up, most of the old family names were not heard, or were heard but obscurely, or perhaps in connection with misfortunes; for many of the old families were vanishing. They and their fathers and grandfathers had slowly made the town; they had always thought of it as their own, and they had expected to sit looking out upon it complacently forever from the plate glass of their big houses on National Avenue and the two other streets parallel to the avenue and nearest it. They had built thick walls round themselves, these "old families," not only when they built the walls of their houses, but when they built the walls encircling their close association with one another. The growth razed all these walls; the "sets" had resisted the "climbers," but the defences fell now; and those who had sheltered behind them were dispersed, groping for one another in the smoke.

It was Dan Oliphant who began the destruction of National Avenue. Among the crumbling families were the Vertreeses; —they retired to what was left of their country estate, which had already been overtaken by the expanding town and compressed to half an acre. Dan bought the old Vertrees Mansion

on National Avenue, tore it down and built upon its site a tremendous square box of concrete fronted with glass—the "sales building" of the "Ornaby Four, the Car of Excellent Service." This was just across the street from where his grandmother had lived, and Harlan protested long and loudly; but Dan was too busy to give his brother a complete attention. He said mildly that his new building seemed at least an improvement upon the shabby boarding-house, which the Vertrees Mansion had become when he bought it; and, when Harlan hotly denied the improvement, Dan sat listening with an expression of indulgence, the while occupying his mind with computations concerning other matters.

For, as Martha had felt, these were his great days, and he was "in on" everything. The Earl of Ornaby was Earl of more than Ornaby now; Ornaby and the "Ornaby Four" were but two of the adventurous fleets he had at sea. He was "in on" a dozen "promotions" at once; "in on" the stock of new "industrials"; inventors and exploiters lived at his office doors. And although all of his fellow-hustlers used the phrase, none could say "my city" with a greater right than he. When he began one of his boostings with, "I believe first of all in my own city," the voice of a religion was heard. He was his city; he was its spirit, and more than any other he was its guide, and yet its slave and worshipper. He could not speak of it except with reverence, nor go on speaking of it long unless he made the eagle scream.

He had become a juggler of money, which poured streaming into one hand as fast as he hurled it aloft with the other. He was one of those men of whom it is said, "Nobody knows what he's worth. He couldn't tell you, himself, to save his life!" He was called "rich," and sometimes he was said to be the richest man in town. He juggled with money, with land, with houses, with skyscrapers, and with factories, keeping them all in the air at once; and his brother said that even so, Dan still "danced the tight rope," maintaining his balance dangerously during the juggling. Meanwhile, as he balanced

and tossed the glittering and ponderous things through the air, the rest of the deafening show went on; the hustling and booming and boosting moving round and round him in clouds of dust to the sound of brass bands, while crowds gazed marvelling up at the juggler, and admired and envied him.

Of all the admirers who now looked up to him, cheering, probably the most enthusiastic was his brother-in-law, George McMillan, whom Dan had made "General Manager of the Ornaby Four." George had not quite fulfilled his own prediction that at forty he was to be a "drunken broker"; but he had come, as he said, "near enough to it"; and he was glad when Dan finally sent for him and his designer of a new gasoline engine, the prospective "Ornaby Four."

"It's the greatest idea in the world," George told his sister. "It's cheap, but not the cheapest; it doesn't compete with the commonest little cars, nor, on the other hand, with even the moderately expensive ones. It's got a place of its own in between, where there are millions of people that can afford a little better car than the cheapest, but wouldn't dream of a luxurious one like the 'Morgan.' It was an inspiration of Dan's to set the price of the 'Ornaby' at eight hundred and eighty-five dollars. I like the sense of adventure you get in a game like this. I like getting out of my New York, and I like the way things move in a place so friendly as this. It's immensely alive, but somehow it does manage to be friendly, too. I don't understand why you've always hated it so."

She explained that she had hated it less when she was in Europe, where she had at last got her year, having taken young Henry with her in spite of her husband's strong protest. The mother and son had just returned. "I think I could stand the place perfectly well, George," she said, "if I were quite sure I'd never have to see it again!"

"But don't you begin to understand *yet* what a husband you've got?" George cried. "Why, he's a great man, Lena!"

Lena laughed and looked at him pityingly; but contented herself with that for argument. To her mind Dan was not made great by becoming the great figure of a city that was

merely growing larger, noisier, and dirtier. She had never cared for anything but Beauty, she said; and, to her mind, as to that of the fastidious Harlan, Dan was only helping to increase hideousness; so she joined her brother-in-law in habitually referring to "Ornaby the Beautiful" as "Ornaby the Horrible." Moreover, although she had never manifested any interest in National Avenue before its destruction began, she became almost vehement upon the subject of its merit as the razing of its old houses continued; and Harlan was again in agreement with her here.

"You and Eugene Morgan and that rascally old Sheridan and your Jew friends are doing an awful thing," he said to Dan at a family dinner. "You're ruining the one decent thing the city possessed—a splendid, dignified old street. It's happening all over the country—one doesn't need half an hour in New York to see that Fifth Avenue is ruined; but I did think we might have escaped here. I doubt if it would ever have occurred to Morgan to put up his awful sales building —with a repair shop in it!—on National Avenue, if you hadn't done it first. Then the others thought they had to follow; and if something isn't done to stop you fellows, the whole avenue will be nothing but a mile row of motor-car sales buildings and pneumatic tire warehouses and garages —a market!—and with hundred-foot smoke-stacks! It may reach even here to our old house and the Shelbys'; and already you've made the peaceful neighbourhood around *my* house horrible. I'd like to know what grandma Savage would have said about the things you people have done to this town! Why, you've made National Avenue begin to look like an old pipe-smoking hag's mouth with every other tooth missing and the rest sticking up all black in the smoke."

Dan laughed absent-mindedly, but remained impervious. Like the ardent Sheridan, he loved the smoke, called it "Prosperity," and drew his lungs full of it, breathing in it the glory of his city. More and more, the city became his city and, with all his juggling and tight-rope dancing he found time to be mayor of it for a year, and to begin the "Park System."

One day he drove his father over the ground he had planned to include in this chain of groves and meadows; and he was glad afterwards that they had made the excursion together.

"It'll be a great thing for the city," his father said, as Dan's car turned homeward with them. "It's a great thing for you to do and to be remembered by. You were a good boy, Dan; and you're a good man and a good citizen. You serve your fellow-men well, I think."

Dan laughed, a little embarrassed by this praise; but although Mr. Oliphant perceived his son's embarrassment, he had more to say, and went on with something like timidity, yet with a gentle persistence: "I'd like to tell you another thing, Dan. It's something your mother and I never felt we ought to talk about to you, but I believe I'll mention it to you to-day. We—you see your mother and I have always thought there's a danger sometimes in letting a person see that you sympathize with him, because it might make him feel that he's unhappy, or in trouble, whereas, if you just leave him to himself he may go on cheerfully enough and never think about it. But I *would* like to tell you—I'd like to say——"

He paused, and Dan asked: "You'd like to say what, sir?"

"Well—I'd like just to tell you that your mother and I think you've always been as kind as you could to Lena."

Surprised, Dan stared at him; and Mr. Oliphant gravely and affectionately returned his look. "Yes, sir," the son said awkwardly. "I hope so. Thank you, sir." And he thought that the handsome, kind old face seemed whiter and more fragile than usual.

That was natural, Dan told himself; people couldn't help growing old, and they grew whiter and thinner as age came upon them; but age didn't necessarily mean ill-health. For that matter, his father hadn't nearly reached a really venerable old age; he was more than a decade younger than old-hickory Shelby, who still never missed a day's work. Nevertheless, there had been something a little disquieting in Mr. Oliphant's manner; it was as if he had thought that perhaps

he might never have another chance to say what he had said;—and that night, on the train to which he had hurried after their drive, Dan thought about his father often.

He thought about him often, too, the next day, in New York; and during the conferences there with the landscape architects who were designing the new parks, his thoughts went uneasily westward;—not to the green stretches of grove and sward that were to be, but to the quiet old man who had walked so slowly between the tall white gateposts after bidding his son good-bye. Recalling this, it seemed to Dan that he had never before seen him walk so slowly; and he went over in his mind, for the fiftieth time, his father's manner in speaking of Lena—the slight, timid insistence, as if there might never be another opportunity to say something he had always wished to say. It had given what he said the air of a blessing bestowed—and of a valedictory.

Thus Dan's vague uneasiness grew, and although he scolded himself for it, and told himself he was imaginative beyond reason, he could not be rid of it. That was well for him; since such uneasiness may be of help when life is like a path whereon tigers leap from nowhere, as it is, sometimes;—the wayfarer will not avoid wounds, but may better survive them for having been in some expectance of them.

For a year Mr. Oliphant's heart had been "not just what it ought to be"; but he told no one that this was his physician's report to him. Harlan's telegram reached New York just as Dan was starting home. Mr. Oliphant had indeed taken his last opportunity to say what he had so long wished to say, for now the kind heart beat no longer;—but he had died proud of his son.

CHAPTER XXV

NEITHER Mr. Oliphant's daughter-in-law nor his grandson was at home at the time of his death. Lena had gone abroad again, for a "three-months' furlough," as she called it; and again in spite of Dan's vehement protest that the boy "ought to see his own country first," she had taken Henry with her.

"I wouldn't mind it so much," Dan said to her before they went;—"but you never even stop off and show him Niagara Falls when you take him to New York to visit your family; and when I want to take him with *me*, you always say he's got a cold or something and has to stay at home. It seems to me pretty near a disgrace for parents to carry their children all over Europe and pay no attention to the greatest natural wonders in the world, right here at home. My father and mother went to Europe with Harlan and me, but not before they'd taken us to see Mammoth Cave and Niagara Falls. Why, it'd take *five* Europes to give me the thrill I got the first time I ever looked at the Falls! It's not fair to Henry, and besides, look what it does to his school work! He picked up some French, yes, the other time you had him over there; but he dropped a whole year in his classes. And how much French is he goin' to need when I take him into business with me? Not a thimbleful in a lifetime! He's the best boy I ever knew and got the finest nature; and he ought to be given the opportunity to learn something about his own country instead of too much Paris!"

This patriotic vehemence went for nothing, since Henry intended to accompany his mother and announced his intentions with a firmness that left his father nothing to do but grumble helplessly, while Lena laughed. At fifteen, Henry had his precocities, and among them a desire (not mentioned)

to revisit the Bal Tabarin, as he retained a pleasant memory of a quiet excursion to this entertainment, during his previous travels, when he was twelve and already influential with Parisian hotel guides. Lena had her way, and, having placed the ocean between herself and further argument on the part of her husband, remained twice as long as the "furlough" she had proposed. She did not return until Dan's term as mayor was concluded, four months after Mr. Oliphant's death.

When she finally did arrive, her appearance was mollifying —she had always looked far less than her age, and now, fresh from amazing cosmetic artists, and brilliantly studied by superb milliners, she was prettier than she had ever been. Strangers would have believed a firm declaration that she was twenty-four; she knew this, and her homecoming mood was lively—but when Dan within the hour of her arrival wished to drive her out to Ornaby to see the new house which he had at last begun to build, after years of planting and landscaping, she declined. Her look of gaiety vanished into the far-away expression that had always come upon her face when the new house was mentioned.

"Not to-day," she said. "I'm not so sure we ought to go ahead with it at all. I don't think we ought to leave your mother; she'd be too lonely in the old house now—living here all alone."

"But I never dreamed of such a thing," Dan protested. "She'll come with us, of course. This old place is going to be sold before long; I've just about talked her into it, and she can get real money for it now. Land along here is worth something mighty pretty these days. Why, Fred Oliphant's family got seven hundred a front foot for their place three months ago, and an absolutely magnificent office-building for doctors is goin' to be put up there. They've got the foundations all in and the first story's almost up already. That's only two blocks below here; and I can get mother almost any price she wants. I'd buy it myself and sell it again, only I wouldn't like to feel I'd taken advantage of her. Why don't you come

on out now with Henry and me and take a look at our own doin's? It'll surprise you!"

"Oh, some day," she said, the absent look not disappearing from her eyes. "I'd rather lie down now, I believe. You run along with Henry."

Henry showed no great enthusiasm about accompanying his father, and when they arrived at the new house seemed indifferent to the busy work going on there. Dan was loud and jocose with him, slapping him on the back at intervals, and inquiring in a shout how it felt to "be back in God's country again." Upon each of these manifestations, Henry smiled with a politeness somewhat constrained, replying indistinctly; and, as they went over the building, now in a skeleton stage of structure, Dan would stop frequently and address a workman with hearty familiarity: "Look what I got with me, Shorty! Just got him back all the way from Europe! How'd *you* like to have a boy as near a man as this? Pretty fine! Yes, sir; pretty fine, Shorty!" And he would throw his ponderous arm about his son's thin shoulders, and Henry would bear the embrace with a bored patience, but move away as soon as he could find an excuse to do so.

He was a dark, slender, rather sallow boy, short for the sixteen years he verged upon, though his face, with its small and shapely features, like his mother's, looked older and profoundly reticent. It was one of those oldish young faces that seem too experienced not to understand the wisdom of withholding everything; and Henry appeared to be most of all withholding when he was with his boisterous, adoring father. Obviously this was not because the boy had any awe of Dan. On the contrary, as one of the friendly and admiring carpenters observed, "The Big Fellow, he's so glad to have that son of his back he just can't keep his hands off him; wants to jest hug him all the time, and it makes the kid tired. Well, I can remember when I was like that—thought I knew it all, and my old man didn't know nothin'! I expect this kid does know a few things the Big Fellow doesn't know he knows, mebbe! Looks like that kind of a kid to me."

The estimate was not ill-founded, as Henry presently demonstrated. Escaping from his father's fond and heavy arm, he seated himself upon a slab of carved stone, produced a beautiful flat gold case, the size and shape of a letter envelope, and drew from it a tiny cigarette of a type made in France for women.

Dan stared at him, frowned, and inquired uncomfortably, but with some severity: "Don't you think you're too young for that, Henry?"

"Young?" Henry seemed to be mildly surprised as he lighted the cigarette. "No, I shouldn't think so. I've smoked for quite some time now, you know."

"No; I certainly didn't know."

"Oh, yes," Henry returned placidly. "It's years since I first began it."

"Well, but see here——" Dan began; then paused, reddening. "I don't believe it'll be very good for your health," he concluded feebly.

"My health's all right," the youth said, with an air that began to be slightly annoyed. "Mother's known I smoked a long while."

"Well, but——" Dan stopped again, his embarrassment increasing and his perplexity increasing with it as he remembered that he himself had smoked at fifteen, surreptitiously. "Well——" he began again, after a pause, during which Henry blew a beautifully formed little smoke ring. "Well——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Well——" Dan said. "Well, I'm glad if you do smoke, you do it openly, anyhow."

"Yes, sir?" Henry returned, with a slight accent of surprise that suggested his inability to perceive any reason for not smoking openly. Then, regarding the incident as closed, he asked: "I suppose you'll put up a garage in proportion to the house, won't you? It's about time I had a car of my own, don't you think, sir?"

"I expect so," Dan said, still uncomfortable. "I expect we'll

have to see about it before long. Anyhow, I would rather you did it openly, Henry. I—I don't—I——" He stopped, in difficulties with a depth of feeling that affected his voice. "I—I don't ever expect to be half as good a father to you, Henry, as my—as my own father was to me, but I—well, your uncle Harlan and I were afraid to smoke before him until we were almost grown up. We used to sneak out to the stable to smoke—or in alleys—and though my father was so much better a man than I am, and so much better a father to me than I can ever hope to be to you, I guess—I guess this is better, Henry. I mean I guess it's better to have you open with me, like this. It's an advance, I expect. I don't know why we were afraid to smoke before father; he never whipped us and he was the kindest man—the best—the best father that ever——" He was unable to continue; and Henry glanced up to see him, red-faced and swallowing, struggling with an emotion that made the boy wonder what in the world was the matter with him.

"I suppose he was, probably," Henry said. "How about that car? Don't you think I might as well have it pretty soon? How about this week's being as good as any other time?"

Dan recovered himself, smiled, and patted his son's shoulder. "I expect so, maybe. We'll drive down to our agents on the avenue before we go home."

And at this Henry proved that he could still show some animation. He sprang up, shouting. "Yaay!" he cried. "*Vive le sport!*" And he leaped into the big Morgan limousine that stood waiting for them in the cluttered driveway. "Come on!" he shouted. "I'll show you how to shoot a little life into this old town!"

Rising from her nap, an hour later, Lena looked from her window and saw them returning. Henry was still animated, talking busily, and, as they came into the house, seemed willing to bear the weight of his father's arm across his shoulders. The mother, looking down upon the pair, smiled thoughtfully to herself;—she was not more indulgent with the boy

than his father was; but she knew that Henry was more hers than he was his father's. He had always been so, because of some chord of subtle understanding struck by her nature and Henry's. She had sometimes been in a temper with him when he was a noisy little boy, but as he grew older she had begun to feel only amusement over his naughtinesses, because she understood them so well;—she laughed at him sometimes, but had long since ceased to chide him. She had no blame for him, and she knew that he would never find fault with her, no matter what she did. They had a mysterious comprehension of each other—a comprehension so complete that they had never needed to speak of it.

She heard him chattering to his grandmother in the hall downstairs, and knew by his tone that his father had bought him something, of which the boy would presently tell her; —she remained standing beside the closed window, waiting for him to come in with his news. Then, as she stood there, a gust drove down a multitude of soot flakes from the smoke-stack of an apartment house that had been built near by, on the cross street just south of the Oliphants', while she was away. After the soot, which flecked the window, the smoke itself descended, enveloping the house so thickly that the window became opaque. Sounds were not shut out, however, and she could still hear all too well the chattering of a steam drill at work across the street, where a public garage was being built. She frowned at the noise, for the drill had disturbed her sleep; and so had the almost unceasing rumble of trucks passing the house; and so had the constant yelp of automobile signals rasping at one another for right of way.

The smoke thinned out, revealing the busy street that had been so different when she had first looked forth upon it from this same window, a bride. She remembered how quiet it had been then—and suddenly she spoke aloud.

"Well, I'm still here!"

Then she laughed softly, as her eyes wandered to the north, crossed the iron picket fence that divided the Oliphants' yard from the Shelbys', and beheld the fountain swan. He

was green no longer; his colour was that of the smoke; and though he still shot a crystal spray, the flying water was the only clean thing about him, or in sight.

"Ridiculous old beast!" Lena said; but there was no bitterness in her tone. It was a long time since she had felt jealous of Martha; and, although she often told Harlan that Martha would never marry him, "because she still hopes Dan'll be a widower some day," the warning had come to be merely jocular, without intended sting. Moreover, she practised the same raillery with her brother after he had taken up his residence in the town; for George offered himself as a rival to Harlan in the half-serious manner of a portly bachelor of forty mildly courting a contemporary.

Lena repeated her opinion of the swan. "Ridiculous old beast!" This time she did not murmur the words as before; but spoke them in her mind, and she immediately followed them with others, the connection being made without any more feeling than she had about the swan. Her thought was merely speculative, even a little compassionate: "I suppose she does still hope it, poor old thing! She thinks maybe, if I leave him——"

But Henry came in with the news of his father's munificence, and interrupted this thought that had been in her mind ever since the night of Martha's return from the long absence in Italy. Throughout all the long time since then, there had always been in Lena's mind a conviction, however obscured or half-forgotten, that some day she would leave her husband.

CHAPTER XXVI

SHE was mistaken about Martha, who never had the definite hope Lena's imagination attributed to her. Martha was steadfast because she could not help it, having been born with this endowment evidently; and her tenderness for the boy she had loved so heartily was imperishable; but the Dan Oliphant of the middle years did not seem to her to be that boy. What she felt for the big middle-aged man, she felt only because he had long ago been the beloved youth; she was not in love with him, nor with anybody. This was the explanation she still found it necessary to make to his brother about once a year—usually on New Year's Day; for it was Harlan's habit to select that hopeful anniversary as a good time to dwell a little upon his patience.

"You call it your patience, but it became only your habit long ago," she told him. "It would really unsettle you badly if I ever said I'd marry you, Harlan; and it would unsettle you even more if I not only said I would, but went ahead and did it. You'd find you'd never forgive me for upsetting your routine. If we were married, where in the world would you ever *go?* You haven't been anywhere for so long, except to see me, that you'd be left without the destination you've been accustomed to. It's gallant of you to still mention your willingness, every now and then, and I own up that I rather expect it and should miss it if you didn't; but if you want to marry, you ought to look about for—well, say a pretty widow of twenty-nine, Harlan. She'd be better for you than one of the 'buds,' though you could have whichever you chose;—they'd jump at the chance! The trouble with me is that I'm too old—and I'm horribly afraid I look my age."

The fear was warranted, though it need not have been a fear. She had escaped the portliness that seemed to threaten

her at thirty, and had escaped too far, perhaps; but her thinness was not angular; and if she looked her age, then that age was no more than a pleasantly responsible age, as Harlan told her, and neither a careworn nor a gray-haired age. In fact, it must be the perfect age, he said—and he wondered if it mightn't be as kind as it looked, and be the perfect age for him.

At that, she became more serious. "I'm surprised at myself every year I grow older," she said. "I'm so much more romantic than I was at twenty, and it seems I keep growing more so. At twenty how I'd have laughed if I'd heard of a woman of forty who said she couldn't marry because she was in love with no one! I suppose what would have struck me as funniest would have been the idea of a woman of forty talking about marrying at all."

She was "in love with no one," but she could still be Harlan's brother's champion, if need arose; and after George McMillan took up his residence in the town, and began his mild rivalry, she had this amiable bachelor to second her. Moreover, it is to be admitted for her that she, who in the bloom of youth had never known how to display the faintest symptoms of coquetry, now sometimes enjoyed tokens of disturbance unwillingly exhibited by Harlan when the rival appeared to win an advantage. McMillan, dark and growing a little bald, counterbalanced what was lacking above by a decoration below already rare in the land, but not yet a curiosity, a Van Dyke beard, well suited to his face. In manner, too, he was equal to the flavour of a fine old portrait, and he had spoken from his childhood in the accent Harlan had carefully acquired. Thus the latter was sometimes but too well encountered on his own ground.

He met one of these defeats in an early April twilight when he had expected to find Martha alone, as he knew a meeting of the board of directors of the "Ornaby Four" had been called for that evening, and George McMillan was a member of the board. The air was warm with one of the misplacements of this season, when sometimes a midsummer day wanders

from its proper moorings and irrationally ascends almost to the chilly headwaters of spring. Martha was upon the veranda, occupied with a fan and the conversation of Mr. McMillan when Harlan arrived; and the newcomer was so maladroit as to make his disappointed expectations plain.

"I thought you had a directors' meeting," he said, almost with his greeting and before he had seated himself in one of the wicker chairs brought out upon the veranda by the unseasonable warmth. "I thought there was——"

George assented placidly. "There was, but it couldn't be held. Our president had to go to another one that he's president of—the Broadwood Interurban. It's in difficulties, I'm afraid, because of too high wages and too much competition by motorcycles and small cars. I hope Dan can straighten it out."

"I hope so," Harlan said. "That is, strictly as his brother I hope so. As a human being still trying to exist in what was once a comfortable house, I might take another attitude. I live deep in the downtown district now, for my worst sins, and those long Broadwood cars screech every hour, night and day, on a curve not a hundred yards from my library." He sighed. "But why should I waste my breath, still complaining? It all grows steadily worse and worse, year after year, and if one happens to like living in a city in his own native land, there's nowhere to escape to. I suppose National Avenue—poor thing, look at the wreck of it!—I say I suppose it couldn't have hoped to escape the fate of Fifth Avenue; for the same miserable ruction is going on all over the country. My illustrious brother and his kind have ruined everything that was peaceful and everything that was clean—they began by murdering the English language, and now they've murdered all whiteness. Beauty is dead."

"Isn't that only a question of your definition?" McMillan inquired.

"Why is it?"

"For one reason, because everything's a question of definitions."

"No, it isn't," Harlan returned somewhat brusquely; and Martha sat in silence, amused to perceive that her two callers had straightway resumed a tilting not infrequent when they met. A lady's part was only to preside at the joust. "There's only one definition of beauty," Harlan added to his contradiction.

"What is it?"

"The one Athens believed in."

"It won't do for that brother of yours," his antagonist returned. "The Greeks are dead, and you can't tie Dan and his sort down to a dead definition. The growth isn't beautiful to you, but it is to them, or else they wouldn't make it. Of course you're sure you're right about your own definition, but they're so busy making what *they*'re sure is beautiful they don't even know that anybody disagrees with them. It won't do you the slightest good to disagree with them, either."

"Why not?"

"Because they've got everything in their hands," George McMillan replied cheerfully;—"and they're too busy to listen to anyone who isn't making something besides criticisms."

"And for that reason," Harlan began, "all of us who care for what's quiet and cool and charming in life are to hold our peace and let——"

He was interrupted, unable to make himself heard because of a shattering uproar that came from beyond the iron fence to the south. A long and narrow motor car, enamelled Chinese red, stood in the Oliphants' driveway, and an undersized boy of sixteen had just run out of the house and jumped into the driver's seat. Dusk had not fallen darkly; he saw the group upon the neighbouring veranda well enough, but either thought it too much effort to salute Martha and his uncles, or was preoccupied with the starting of his car;—he gave no sign of being aware of them. Evidently the unmuffled machine-gun firing of his exhaust was delightful to his young ears, for he increased its violence to the utmost, although the noise

was unlawful, and continued it as he shot the car down the drive, out of the gates and down the street at a speed also unlawful.

"There, at least," Harlan said, "is something of which criticism might possibly be listened to with good effect—even by my busy brother."

But George laughed and shook his head. "No. That's the very last thing he'd allow you to criticize. He'd only tell you that Henry is 'the finest young man God ever made!' In fact, that's what he told me yesterday evening when I dined there; and I had more than a suspicion I'd caught a whiff of something suggesting a cocktail from our mutual nephew, as he came in for a hurried dinner between speedings. But that isn't Dan's fault."

"Yes, it is," Harlan said. "Giving a sixteen-year-old boy a car like that!"

"No, the fault is my sister's. What's a boy to do when his mother keeps him hanging around Paris so long in the autumn that it's too late for him to make up his class-work, and he has only a tutor to cajole? I don't blame Henry much. In fact, the older I grow the less I blame anything."

"No?" Harlan said. "I'm afraid the world won't get anywhere very fast unless there are some people to point out its mistakes."

But the other bachelor jouster was not at all disconcerted by this reproof, nor by the tone of it, which was incautiously superior. "By George, Oliphant, I always *have* believed you were really a true Westerner under that surface of yours! The way you said 'the world won't get anywhere very fast' was precisely in the right tone. You're reverting to type, and if the reversion doesn't stop I sha'n't be surprised to hear of your breathing deep of the smoke and calling it 'Prosperity' with the best of them!"

Harlan was displeased. "I suppose the smoke comes under your definition of beauty, too, doesn't it?"

"It isn't my definition," George explained. "I was groping

for Dan's. Yes, I think the smoke's beautiful to him because he believes it means growth and power, and he thinks they're beautiful."

"I dare say. Would you consider it a rational view for any even half-educated man to hold—that soft-coal smoke is beautiful? Do you think so, Martha, when it makes pneumonia epidemic, ruins everything white that you have in your house and everything white that you wear? Do you?"

"It's pretty trying," she answered, as a conscientious housewife, but added hopefully: "We'll get rid of it some day, though. So many people are complaining of it I'm sure they'll do something about it before long."

Harlan laughed dryly, for he had hoped she would say that. "I've been re-reading John Evelyn's diary," he said. "Evelyn declared the London smoke was getting so dreadful that a stop would have to be put to it somehow. The king told him to devise a plan for getting rid of it, and Evelyn set about it quite hopefully. That was in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Evelyn is dead, but the smoke's still there."

"And yet," George McMillan said coolly, "I'm told they've made quite a place of London, in spite of that!"

Martha laughed aloud, and Harlan was so unfortunate as to be annoyed. "It seems rather a childish argument in view of the fact that we sit here in the atmosphere of what might well be a freight yard," he said; and, turning to Martha, he spoke in a lowered voice, audible to his opponent, yet carrying the implication that McMillan was excluded from the conference. "My committee have at last got the symphony organization completed," he said. "The orchestra knows it can depend on a reliable support now, and the first concert will be two weeks from to-night. I hope you won't mind going with me."

"No; I won't mind," she said, and hospitably explained to McMillan: "We've been trying for years to expand our week of the 'April Festival' into something more permanent. Mr. Oliphant has done most of the work, and it's really a public service. It will be good news for your sister;—I under-

stand she's always felt we were a lost people, in music particularly."

"We'll have a start at any rate," Harlan said, as he rose to go. "That is, if the smoke doesn't throttle our singers. Venable is back from South America and there ought to be some interest to hear him."

"Venable?" George repeated. "Did you say Venable?"

"Yes; the baritone. He's still just in his prime; at least so his agent says. Have you ever heard him?"

"Long ago," the other returned. "I——" He stopped abruptly.

"Did you know him?" Martha asked.

"No. That is, I had a short interview with him once, but —no, I shouldn't say I know him." He rose, in courtesy, to the departing Harlan, and extended his hand. "You mustn't wait behind the next corner and leap out on me with a bowie-knife, Oliphant," he said. "I didn't mean to be such a disagreeable arguer."

"Not at all," Harlan returned, somewhat coldly, though he added an effect of geniality to his departure by a murmur of laughter, and got away without any further emphasis upon his disappointment at finding his rival in possession. The latter gentleman, however, made little use of the field left open to him. Not long after Harlan had gone Martha noticed that her remaining guest seemed to be rather absent-minded, and she rallied him upon it.

"I'm afraid you thrive upon conflict, Mr. McMillan."

"Why?"

"Peace doesn't seem to stimulate you—or else *I* don't! You've hardly spoken since Mr. Oliphant left. I'm afraid you're——"

"You're afraid I'm what?" he said, as she paused; and although the dusk had fallen now, it was not too dark for her to see that his preoccupation was serious.

"Are you troubled about anything?" she asked.

"No. Why?"

"I thought you looked——"

"Oh, no," he said. "It's nothing. Perhaps I am a little bothered," he admitted. "But it's only about business."

"Not about the 'Ornaby Four'?" she said, surprised. "I thought it was established as a tremendous success."

"Oh, it is," he assured her promptly. "It is. It's an extraordinary little car and nothing can stop it—except temporarily. It's bound to climb over any little temporary difficulties. We may have made mistakes, but they won't amount to anything in the long run."

"You say you *have* made mistakes?"

"Not until this year, and even then nothing we can't remedy. You see Dan's a great fellow for believing in almost anything that's new, and an inventor came along last summer with a new type of friction clutch; and we put it in our car. Then I'm afraid we built a fairly enormous number of 'Fours' during the winter, but you see we were justified in that, because we knew there'd be a demand for them."

"And there wasn't?"

"Oh, yes; there was. But——" he paused; then went on: "Well, the people haven't seemed to like the new clutch, and that gives us rather a black eye for the time being. Of course we're going to do our best to straighten things out; we'll put our old clutch back on all the new cars, but——"

He paused uncomfortably again, and she inquired: "But won't that make everything all right again?"

"Oh, yes—after a time. The trouble is, I'm afraid it's stopped our sales rather flat—for the time being, that is. You see, there's a lot of money we expected would be pouring in on us about now—and it doesn't pour. I'm not really worried, but I'm a little afraid Dan might need it, because his interurban ventures appear to have been—well, rather hazardous. You told me once that his brother's description of him was 'dancing on the tight-rope' and in a way that's not so far wrong. Of course he'll pull through." George suddenly struck the stone railing beside him a light blow with his open hand, and jumped up. "Good gracious! What am

I doing but talking business to a lady on a spring evening? I knew I was in my dotage!" And he went to the steps.

"Wait," Martha said hurriedly. "You don't really think——"

"That Dan Oliphant's affairs are in any real danger? No; of course not;—I don't know what made me run on like that. Men go through these little disturbances every day; it's a part of the game they play, and they don't think anything about it. You can be sure *he* isn't worrying. Did you ever know him to let such things stop him? He's been through a thousand of 'em and walked over 'em. He's absolutely all right."

"You're sure?" she said, as he went down the steps.

"He's absolutely all right, and I'd take my oath to it," George said; but he added: "That is, he is if the banks don't call him."

"If the banks don't what?"

He laughed reassuringly. "If the banks don't do something they have no reason to do and certainly won't do. Good-night. I'm going to stop in next door and see my sister a little while before she goes to bed."

His figure grew dimmer as he went toward the gate, and Martha, staring after him, began to be haunted by that mysterious phrase of his, "if the banks don't call him."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE next day, at lunch, she asked her father what it meant, though she did not mention Dan; and she brought out a crackling chuckle from that old bit of hickory, now brittle and almost sapless, but still serviceable.

"Means a bank wants its money back; that's all," he said. "There's plenty of reasons why a bank wants money—same as anybody else."

"But suppose I'd borrowed of a bank and was a good customer, and the bank knew I had plenty of property to cover the loan, would the First National, for instance, ever worry me to pay it, if they knew I only needed a little time to get all I owed it?"

"Not unless we thought you mightn't be as able to pay us as well later on as when we ask for it," the old man answered. "You'd be all right as long as the First stood by you. The First'll protect a customer long as anybody; and the others all follow our lead. What in time's the matter with you? You plannin' to borrow money? Geemunently! I should think you'd be able to put up with what you get out o' me!"

His voice cracked into falsetto, as it often did nowadays; but the vehemence that cracked it was not intended to be serious; he was in a jocular mood; and the conversation reassured her, for he was one of the directors of the "First"; and if Dan were really in difficulties and the bank meant to increase them, she thought her father would have seized upon the occasion to speak of it triumphantly. Indeed, he had once angrily instructed her to wait for such an occasion. "You just wait till the time comes!" he had said. "You sit there crowin' over me because I used to prophesy Dan Oliphant was never goin' to amount to anything, and you claim

all this noise and gas proves he *has!* You just wait till the day comes when I get the chance to crow over *you*, miss! You'll hear me!"

She was convinced that he wouldn't have missed the chance to crow. Nevertheless a little of her uneasiness remained, and was still with her, two weeks later, when she went with Harlan to the concert of the new symphony orchestra, on an evening so drenched with rain that she inquired with some anxiety if his car was amphibious.

"If it can't swim I'm afraid we won't get there," she said, as they set off upon the splashing avenue. "Judging by the windows, we aren't in an automobile, but in one of those tanks that take pictures of ocean life for the movies. I'm not sure it's a tank though; the old avenue has turned into a river, and perhaps we're in a side-wheel steamboat. I'm afraid this'll be bad for your attendance. You'll have a big deficit to make up in reward for your struggle to make us an artistic people."

There was to be no deficit, however, she discovered, as they went to their seats in the theatre Harlan's committee had taken for the concert;—interest in the new organization and in the coming of the renowned Venable had been stronger than the fear of a wetting. The place was being rapidly filled, and, glancing about her, Martha saw "almost everybody and a great many others," she said.

Not far away from where she and Harlan sat, Lena was in a box with George McMillan. The other seats in the box were vacant; and Lena, sitting close to the velvet rail, and wearing as a contrast to her own whiteness a Parisian interpretation of Spanish passion, in black jet and jet-black, was the most conspicuous figure in the theatre. She leaned back in her chair, her brilliant eyes upon the stage, though there was nothing there except a piano and a small forest of music stands; and Martha thought she looked excited—music was evidently a lively stimulant for her. Her brother, not quite so much within the public view, and possibly wishing his sister were less vividly offered to that view, appeared to the observing Martha as somewhat depressed and nervous.

There was no conversation between the brother and sister, though he glanced at Lena from time to time, from the side of his eye.

Martha wondered where Dan was. He would prefer a concert by Sousa's Band to the French and Russian programme set for this evening, she knew; but the opening of "the Symphony" was in its way a civic occasion; one for which the credit was in some part due to his brother; and she had expected him to be there. "Isn't Dan coming?" she asked Harlan.

"I think so."

"Do you think he's worried about business lately, Harlan?"

"No, I don't think he ever worries about anything."

"Oh, but you're wrong!" she said quickly. "You don't know him; a man can't sacrifice everything to just one object in life, as he has, all these years, and not worry about it. I know your mother worries about *him*. She says he never takes any care of himself, and it's beginning to tell on him. But I mean are there any—any rumours around town that he's in some sort of business difficulty, or anything like that?"

"No; I think not. At least I haven't heard of anything like that being more prevalent with him than usual. He's always up and down, either up to his neck or riding on the crest—that's his way, and I don't believe he'd enjoy himself otherwise. The only thing he could talk about when I saw him yesterday at home was his new house. It's finished at last; and they're going to move into it. Mother's sold our old place, you know, and the wrecking will begin next week. Pleasant for you!"

"Oh, I'm trying to get father to go, too," she said. "He's terribly obstinate, but with the house on the other side of us rebuilt into an apartment, and now your mother's to be torn down, he'll have to give in. We'll have to move out to northern Ornaby like everybody else. You'll have to come, too, Harlan."

"Thank you," he said. "I've been waiting a good many

years for that invitation. May I make an appointment with your father for to-morrow morning?"

She laughed, blushed, and touched his coat sleeve with her folded fan of black feathers. "Hush! People will hear you!"

"You fear it may be suspected that I'm still serious in my intentions?"

"Hush!" she said again. "I mean we're about to hear some serious music, and it's no time for nonsense."

Harlan was obedient; he said no more, but brightened as he listened to the serious music;—her tone had been kind and he hoped that he was not mistaken in thinking he detected something a little self-conscious in it. He was no eager lover now; his bachelorhood was pleasant to him; and he could be content with it; but as Martha leaned forward to listen he looked sidelong at her and felt that he had been right and wise to wish for no other woman. They had been companions for so long, and understood each other so well, marriage would be no disturbing change for either of them. He was assured of happiness in it, if he could persuade her, and something in the way she had just spoken to him made him almost sure that he was about to persuade her at last.

After the first suite by the orchestra the great Venable appeared, making his way among the seated musicians and coming forward with an air of affability operatic in its sweeping expressiveness—a pale, handsome, black-haired man of grand dimensions. He needed no costume other than his black clothes and shapely ampleness of white front to make him seem, not an actual man, but a figure from romantic drama, a dweller in enchanted palaces and the master of heroic passions.

"I've always wanted to see one of those splendid, big, statuesque opera or concert people at home," Martha whispered to her escort. "I've never been near them except when they moved on the grand scale, like this. It would be an experience to see a man like that eat an egg—I can't imagine it at all. Do you suppose he could?"

A moment later, when he began to sing, she was sure he

couldn't; and as the magnificent instrument in his throat continued in operation, he carried her to such thrilling grandeurs of feeling that she could not even imagine herself eating an egg, or eating anything, or ever again doing anything commonplace—for while he sang she, too, dwelt in enchanted palaces, moved on the grand scale, and knew only heroic emotions.

But when he had finished the encore he was generous enough to add to this part of his programme, and had left the stage, she underwent a reaction not unusual after such stimulations. "It's a great voice and he's a great artist, if I'm equal to knowing either," she said. "But there's something about that man— I don't know what, except it all seems to end in being about himself. It's so personal, somehow. I'm positive he made every woman in the whole audience wish that he were singing just for her alone. I don't think music ought to be like that, unless perhaps sometimes when it's a love-song, and those things he sang weren't supposed to——" She broke off suddenly, as her glance wandered. "There's Dan. He got here, after all."

Dan was coming down the outer aisle to the box where Lena sat; and with him was the younger Sam Kohn, the two having just entered the theatre after the business conference that had detained them. Sam was talking hurriedly and earnestly in husky whispers, which he emphasized with many gestures; but he left his tall companion at the curtains of the latter's box.

"See you right after the show," he said, and then went slowly to the series of boxes occupied by his father and brother and their families, while Dan, who looked sallow and tired, Martha thought, stared after him for a moment, then moved forward and seated himself beside George McMillan. Lena gave her husband the greeting of a slightly lifted eyebrow, shown to him in profile; but McMillan leaned toward him and whispered an anxious question.

"It's all right," Dan said. "Sam Kohn's got his father's promise to hold out against 'em. They want every inch of

Ornaby I've got left—that's what they've really been after a long time. I'd like to see anybody get Ornaby away from me! They want the Four, too, and they think they've got both; but they won't get either. The Kohns'll play it through on my——"

But Lena stopped this inappropriate talk of mere business. She made a slight gesture with her lovely little bare arm, her fingers flashing impatient sparks; and Dan was silent. He remained so throughout the rest of the concert, listening with an expression not unamiable, though at times his big face, lately grown flaccid and heavier, fell into the shapings that indicate drowsiness; and once or twice his glance was vaguely troubled, happening to rest upon the white contours of his wife's shoulders;—her glittering black scarf had fallen as she leaned forward when the godlike baritone came out again.

"That fellow looks kind of soft-soapy, but he's got a crackin' good voice," was Dan's placid comment, at the conclusion of the last encore of the final number. Venable was withdrawing from the stage, and most of the audience were getting on their wraps; but an admiring and avaricious gallery demanded more of the charmer, and clapped on. He stopped, shook his head, smilingly, then made his last bow profoundly and obliquely, with a shift of his large eyes in the same direction. "Not bowin' to *us*, is he?" Dan inquired, surprised. "I don't know him."

"I do," Lena said, "I told you the other day I used to know him. I'm going around to speak to him."

"I can't wait, I'm afraid. Sam Kohn's lookin' for me in the lobby now, and he and I got to have a talk with his father. You take the car, Lena—I'll leave it in front for you, and I'll get Sam to drive me home from old man Kohn's. I'll have to hurry."

McMillan was looking at his sister darkly and steadily. "I'll see to Lena," he said. "I'll go with her wherever she wants to go, and then I'll take her home."

Lena laughed airily. "Why, no; it isn't necessary. You'd better go with Dan."

"No; I believe I'd better go with you, Lena."

"Can't wait for you to settle it," Dan said. "It's pretty important I don't miss Sam. I may be out fairly late, Lena. Good-night." And, leaving the brother and sister confronting each other, before they moved toward the stage door behind the boxes, he hurried out to the lobby, where Sam Kohn seized his arm.

"I'll take you over to papa's in my car, Dan," he said. "I been talkin' some more to the old man durin' the show. He'll stick, all right, as a favour to me, because I put it to him pretty stiff that you're my old friend, and what you've done for this town has made money for Kohn & Sons, and 's bound to make more in the future, besides; and I told him anyhow, by golly, he just had to! Well, he says he'll stick, and he'll do it, Dan; but he ain't none too sure he can carry them old shellbacks with him. He ain't never been any pessimist about anything, Dan, but he thinks they see a chance to clean up if they call you. He's afraid he can't stop 'em from doin' it, Dan."

Dan frowned angrily. "Well—let 'em call! They can't break me! I'll *make* it, all right, Sam—I've been through these things before."

Sam's voice had shown some emotion, but now it became tremulous with sympathy and with anger. "That bunch of old shellbacks, they haven't got sense enough to see what a man like you means to their own business in the long run. They haven't got any what you call vision, as it were. They belong to the old generation, the bunch of old back numbers! Honest, they make me sick as a cat, Dan."

He was still thus abusing the shellbacks when he and his friend passed out of the theatre, and were almost swept from their feet by squalls of chilling rain before they could get into his car. He did all the talking, an unusual thing for Dan to allow a companion to do. Always before, when misfortune had threatened, he had been jauntily voluble.

He did not come home until one o'clock, but there was a light in the library, and, going in, he found his mother reading

"In Memoriam." She had begun to stoop after her husband's death, and her hair had lost its last touch of gray; it was all white now, so that even to the glamouring eyes of her son she had come to be a little, fragile old lady; but her good will to all the world still looked forth through the thick glass of her spectacles.

"Why, mother! You oughtn't to be up this late!"

"I just got to reading——" she explained. "I like to read on a rainy night. Did you lock the front door?"

"Yes. Isn't Lena in?"

"Yes. Mr. McMillan brought her home an hour ago. Yes; *she's* in."

Dan laughed, noting her emphasis. "'*She* is?'" he repeated. "Well, then we're *all* in. Who else is left to come in?" He went to her and patted her shoulder. "I believe you were sitting up for me. Don't you know better?"

"I might be anxious about you, such a bad night, Dan," she said. "I don't like to pester you, but you ought to take some regular exercise. You never *have* taken any; and you eat your meals just any time you happen to get a minute or two. I do think you've been looking pretty run-down lately; but I wasn't sitting up for you—not exactly, that is. I mean I was really sitting up for somebody else."

"Who?"

She smiled apologetically. "Of course I know young people are different nowadays, and it isn't a grandmother's place to interfere; but I am afraid it was a mistake, your getting Henry that car."

"You don't mean to tell me he's not in the house?"

"I'm afraid so. After the rest of you had gone he said he believed he'd go for a drive in his car. I said he mustn't think of it on such a night, but he laughed, and I couldn't get him to pay any attention. I was hoping to hear him come in before you did. Perhaps you'd better——"

"Yes," Dan said, as he strode into the hall. "I think I had."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE FOUND Henry, but the search took two hours, and his clothes were sodden with the rain that drenched them as he got in and out of his car to make inquiries, or to investigate restaurants of lively all-night reputations. The red "speedster" he had bought for his son stood hub-deep in the running gutter before the last of these to be reached; and when the father brought his boy out of the place, and helped him into the Morgan limousine, Henry protested in a whimper somewhat incoherent that he wanted to drive his own car home;—he didn't like to leave it out all night in the rain he said.

"I guess it *has* stood where it is about long enough!" Dan told him grimly. "But we'll leave it there till I send a man for it in the morning—to sell it, Henry."

Henry whimpered again; then recovered enough presence of mind to say no more. When they reached home, he went upstairs as quickly as he could, although once he had to employ the assistance of the banister railing; and his father followed him.

A light still shone into the hall from the library door, and Dan, whose face was pallid and startled, made his voice cheerful as he called from the stairway: "It's all right, mother. The boy's home and everything's all right. Just a little foolishness with his car; and I've decided it'll be offered for sale to-morrow. You go to bed now."

Henry went to his room and Dan was following him, when Lena, wearing a bright kimono over her nightdress, made her appearance in the open doorway of her bedroom. "What *is* all this?" she asked petulantly.

"Never mind!"

"But I do mind! What are you saying about selling Henry's car? Didn't I hear you say——"

"Yes, you did." Dan closed the door of Henry's room and came to her. "I made a terrible mistake to give it to him. We've both made a mistake the way we've raised him. He's a good boy; he's got a fine nature and a noble soul. But he's got with bad companions. He's been——" He paused, and went on slowly, with difficulty: "He's been—he's been drinkin', Lena."

She said nothing, but stared at him blankly for a moment —then the stare became an angry one.

"We've got to change our whole way of treatin' Henry," her unhappy husband told her. "We've been all wrong. He—he got with bad companions——"

"Yes," she interrupted angrily. "I should think he might, in a town like this!"

"My Lord! It ain't the *town's* fault. For heaven's sake, don't go back to that old story at a time like this!"

"Yes, I will," she said. "The time's come when you've got to let me take Henry and go where I want to."

Dan looked dazed. "Go where you want to? Why, where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere I please!"

"But, my Lord! You were away seven months out of last year. You only got back from Europe last October! What do you——"

"I want to go and I want to take Henry with me! What's just happened proves that I'm right. This is the wrong place for him."

"But I tell you the place hasn't got anything on earth to do with it."

"Hasn't it?" she cried. "I tell you it has all to do with it, just as it's had all to do with me ever since I came here! I've hated it every instant of all these silly, wasted years I've been pent up here. And now it's ruining my child—yes, ruining him—and you want me still to stay here and let *him* stay here! You want me to waste the rest of my life, and ruin my *child's* life, but I tell you, Dan Oliphant, you can't make us *do* it—not either of us! Not *either* of us, do you hear?"

She had become hysterical, and her voice was so wild and loud that Mrs. Oliphant had come into the hall, downstairs, and was calling up piteously to know what was the matter.

"What *is* the matter, Dan, dear?" she called. "What *is* the matter with Lena?"

But Lena, shrieking, "You can't *make* us—you can't *make* us!" ran into her room and locked the door. It was a thick old door, but she could still be heard, and it was not difficult to understand that she had thrown herself upon her bed, and was there convulsive, still shrieking: "You can't *make* us! You can't *make* us! You can't, you can't, you *can't*——"

CHAPTER XXIX

DAN reassured his mother as well as he could. "Only a fit of nerves;—too much music, I guess," he said; and, returning to his son's door, found it locked and Henry as unresponsive as the door. The father knocked repeatedly but not loudly, demanding admittance and obtaining the response of a profound silence. Then, as he heard Mrs. Oliphant slowly ascending the stairs to her belated bed, he decided to keep out of her way until he had better composed himself, and, retiring to his own room, discovered that his teeth were chattering.

He removed his cold and sodden garments; but his bed seemed as cold as his clothes; so he got up, put a dressing-gown over his pajamas, and again tried to sleep. The bed still seemed cold—so cold that his teeth still showed the disposition to chatter. However, he told himself that he had "more to worry about than a little chill"; and, between the chill and his more important worries, slept but fitfully. He was warm when the drizzly morning came—too warm—and, again communing with himself on the subject of his physical annoyances, philosophically dismissed the fever as unworthy of his attention. "A little temperature's perfectly natural after a chill," he thought. "It'll pass off, and I've got other things to think about *this* day!"

So, descending early to the dining-room he had a cup of strong coffee, and left the house without having seen anybody except the cook and his chauffeur. The interview with his son was postponed until evening;—Dan felt he would be better fitted to speak with authority after he had beaten the shellbacks and had shown the First National, with the help of the Kohns and some others, that it wouldn't do to "call" him.

He had a hard day of it; the shells of the shellbacks were tough and seasoned casings, tough as old hickory, and about as penetrable to mere argument. The morning began ominously, and the afternoon came to a close, in the office of Sam Kohn, Junior, in something not far from complete disaster; though Sam insisted, when he and Dan were finally left alone together there, that it was not complete.

"No, sir!" he said. "The way you got a perfect right to look at it, it ain't near as bad as it might been. Maybe from one angle you can say you come out the little end of the horn, but from another angle, you certainly did come *out*, you might say. You got to look at it from this angle, Dan: you *might* been sittin' there stone cold broke right now. I tell you last night late, when I talked it over with the old man after you'd gone, I was mighty scared it was goin' to be bankruptcy —but it's a lot better than that. *Ain't* it better'n that, Dan?"

Dan looked up without altering the despondent attitude into which he had fallen, as he sat in one of his friend's mahogany office chairs. "Yes; I guess it could have been a good deal worse. The only trouble is——" He took a deep and laboured breath, then laughed plaintively. "The only trouble is, while it might have been worse, I wasn't hardly prepared for its bein' so bad!"

"But it ain't so *blame* bad, Dan."

"No; I thought when I showed 'em what I had to fall back on they'd see they couldn't afford to call. I thought I could show 'em it would be so profitable to tide me over and let me renew that they'd see it was the best policy. They *ought* to have seen it, too!"

Agreeing with this, Sam swore heartily, then he added, "Them old hardshells! The worst about 'em is they got their business training when everything was on the small scale, and they don't know what a liberal policy means. You take that old Shelby, for instance, he was raised on such a stingy scale he thinks everybody's a gambler that borrows a nickel on a million-dollar bond! He's got one foot in the grave and

he's so shrunk it takes two people to see him, but, by golly, he wants to get his hands on everything! They're a tough bunch, Dan, and I'm glad you got away from 'em alive. Because you still *are* alive. Anyhow you're *that* much!"

Dan shook his head. "Just barely, I guess. If it had been that Broadwood hard luck by itself, I'd have pulled out o' the hole. If that hadn't come just at the same time our sales smashed with the Four——"

"That's exactly the way bad things do come, though," Sam interrupted, and went on to expound the philosophy of misfortune. "They come together, because that's what makes 'em bad. It's the comin' together of bad things that makes all the trouble there is. If they'd come one at a time a person wouldn't mind 'em so much. The angle I look at it, if a person goes along all right for a good while it's only because a whole lot of bad things are holdin' off on him. That makes 'em bound to come together when they do come. It never rains but it pours, Dan, as it were. That's why, when such things happen, we got to put up the best umbrella a feller can lay his hands on."

Dan did not seem to have heard him. "I *could* stand havin' to sign over the Four to 'em, Sam," he said. "I'd like to have kept it in my hands, but I could *stand* havin' 'em take it. But when I think I had to sit here and sign over *Ornaby*——" Suddenly he uttered a broken sound, like a groan; and his whole face became corrugated with a distortion that took more than a moment to conquer. "Why, I've just given my life's blood to Ornaby, and now——"

"Now?" Sam said testily. "Well, what's the matter with now? Didn't we force 'em to agree to turn you over some stock in it when they get the organization made? You ain't out of Ornaby, are you? Not entirely, by no means!"

"It's not mine," Dan said. "It's not mine any longer. Nothin's mine any longer!"

His friend affected an angry impatience. "Don't sit there and talk like that to a person that knows something! If you'd had to make the kind of assignment you *might* had to,

you'd be where it would be pretty hard for you to come back. Ain't you goin' to try to come back?"

"Don't you worry about that," Dan said. "I'm just as sure to come back as I am to go out of that door!" He laughed rather shakily, as he rose to go. "Why, a few years from now—less'n that!—why, by this time next *year* if I don't get Ornaby back I'll make a new Ornaby—I'll find it somewhere, and this town won't take long to grow out to it, the way it's started now. Don't you ever worry about my comin' back!"

"That's the ticket!" his friend cried. "That's the way you used to talk. You go home and get a good rest—you certainly been through a rough day, and you look like it!—and then you get up to-morrow morning and start to come back!"

"That's the programme I've mapped out, Sammy. I guess you're right about my gettin' on home, too. I don't feel just the freshest in the world."

"Wait a minute," the other said. "I want to make certain about one thing. You told me I mustn't go near your brother, and my tacklin' him the way I did this morning behind your back—well, I never liked the cold-blooded silk-stocking upstart, but he *did* show he's a gentleman. I been afraid——" He hesitated, somewhat confused. "Well, I know how it is in families, when one of a family don't want help from another of the same family, the last person on earth, and I been kind of afraid you might hold it some against me, my tacklin' him behind your back like that, after you told me not to."

"Bless you, no!" Dan said heartily. "You haven't done me anything except kindness."

"Well, and I've had many's the favour from you, both business and outside, Dan. That's why I persuaded the old man the city needs a man like you. You got many's the long year of good in you yet, Dan."

"I hope so; I hope so," Dan said, and held out his hand. "Good-night, and thank you."

But Sam almost jumped as he took the extended hand. "My goodness, man, you ought to be home in bed! You had

too much excitement and you got a high fever. If I had a temperature like that, I wouldn't be here in my office; I'd be talkin' to my doctor."

"Oh, it'll pass off," Dan returned cheerfully. "It's only one of those up-and-down things—chilly a little while and too hot the next little while. Good-night, old man." And with that, he thanked this boyhood friend again, and descended to the busy street.

After a cloudy day the sky had cleared; a fair sunset was perceptible as a gloomy fire in the heart of the western smoke; and Dan, having long since dismissed his chauffeur, decided to walk home, instead of taking either a trolley car or a taxicab. Before he had gone far, however, he regretted this decision, for his feet had assumed a peculiar independence, and seemed to be unfamiliar parts of him: it was only by concentrating his will upon them that he forced them to continue to be his carriers. "Strange!" he thought. "A man's own feet behavin' like that!"

Then he laughed to himself, not grimly, yet somewnat ruefully. Everything he had believed his own seemed to be behaving like that. Ornaby Addition had been as much a part of him as his feet were, but he was making his feet behave; and when he could get his breath, and start in again, he would make Ornaby behave once more. The shellbacks might get Ornaby away from him for a while, but they couldn't keep it!

When he reached the tall cast-iron Oliphant gateposts, white no longer, but oyster-coloured with the city grime, there was a taxicab waiting in the street before them; and by this time he was so lifelessly tired he wished the cab might carry him into the house, but exerting his will, made his erratic feet serve him that far. He found his brother-in-law in the library with Mrs. Oliphant, who was crying quietly.

George jumped up as Dan came into the room. "Dan, I'm glad you've come before I have to go. I've got to catch the six-fifteen for New York——"

"No," Dan said, and he sat heavily in one of the comfortable old easy-chairs. "No. I don't believe you better leave

town just now. They've thrown me out of control, but I got 'em to promise they'll keep you on, George. If there's somebody there that's in my interest, maybe when I get on my feet again——" He turned to his mother, looking at her perplexedly: "For heaven's sake, don't cry, mother! I'm sorry you've heard about it, but don't you fret; I'll get back —after I've had a few days' rest, maybe I will. I don't believe you'd better go to New York just now, George."

"I've got to," George said. "Dan, I want—I want you to forgive me."

"For wanting to go to New York?"

"No. For ever introducing you to my sister. Your mother wasn't at home this afternoon, and at three o'clock Lena left for New York."

"She did?"

"Yes. Your chauffeur took her to the train. She told him—Dan, she told him to say she wouldn't be back, and she took Henry with her."

"Wait a minute!" Dan passed his hand over his forehead, and uttered a confused and plaintive sound of laughter. "Just a minute," he said apologetically. "There's a good deal kind of seems to've hit me all at once. I guess I'll have to go kind of slow takin' it in. You say Lena says she isn't comin' back home?"

"She had the kindness to tell the chauffeur to say so," George replied bitterly.

"And Henry——"

"Henry went with her."

"I guess then I better go after him," Dan said, and he rose; but immediately sank back in his chair. "I don't know if I'd be able to go on your train, though. I expect maybe I need a good night's sleep, first. I——"

"Will you leave it to me?" George asked sharply. "Will you just leave it to me?"

"You mean gettin' them to come home?"

"'Them!'" George said. "I'm not sure that you need my sister here any longer. I don't think you ever needed her very

much. But you do want your son, and if you'll leave it to me, I think I can bring him. Will you, Dan?"

"I guess I'll have to—just now," Dan answered, with a repetition of his apologetic laugh. "It's all seemed to 've kind of hit me at once, as it were, George. I'm afraid what I need's a good night's sleep. I'm afraid I'll have to leave it to you."

"I'll bring him!" McMillan promised. "I'll have him back here with me four days from now."

CHAPTER XXX

HE MADE this promise with an angrily confident determination to fulfil it, but the next few days were to teach him that he had not yet learned all there was to know about his sister. When he forced his way to an interview with her in her rooms in the hotel to which she had gone in New York, she laughed at his fury.

"*Why* haven't I been a good wife to him?" she asked. "I've spent quite a number of years in purgatory, trying to stick to what I undertook when he married me! Oh, yes, I know you like the place, George; and I don't challenge your viewpoint. But I have my own, and, whether it's right or not, it's mine and I can't get rid of it. I suffer by it, and I have to live by it—and to me the place has always been a purgatory. It's interesting to you, but it's hideous to me. You like the people;—to you they seem intelligent and friendly. To me they're intrusive barbarians with unbearable voices. I stood it at first because I had to; I didn't have anywhere else to go, and I did care for Dan. Then I kept on standing it because I'd got the habit, I suppose, and because it's hard to get the courage to break away. Well, thank Heaven, something's given me the courage at last. I was always just on the very verge of it, and the trouble about Henry pushed me over. I've perished for years because I couldn't get a breath of art; I haven't lived——"

"You could have!" he cried. "With such a man——"

"Dan? Good heavens! I might go on living with a man, even after I'd stopped caring for him, if he still cared for me; but it's years since I realized absolutely that neither of us cared for the other. I knew then I'd have to do this some day."

"And how beautifully you did do it!" her brother exclaimed. "His mother told me about your screaming and

storming at Dan after he brought that miserable boy home. Do you think I didn't understand? You *wanted* a quarrel to justify your going, so that the real reason wouldn't be suspected. You'd seen that singing *beef* again, and you meant to see him *again*—oh, I kept near you that night, and I read you, every instant! You haven't fooled me about what gave you the 'courage,' Lena! It was indeed 'the breath of art,' old girl, and not 'the trouble about Henry'! You made that quarrel with Dan deliberately. It was to cover what you weren't thoroughbred enough to face. You weren't honest enough to——"

"At least I'm honest enough to tell you that you're wasting your breath," Lena said coolly. "You want to take Henry home with you, but he doesn't care to go. He behaved idiotically there—it *isn't* a good place for him—and of course, under the circumstances, he's embarrassed about going back. He wants to stay with me just now, and he'll do what I tell him. You can't take him back with you, but if you'll obtain a proper allowance for me, or a settlement, from my husband, I'll arrange later for Henry to spend a part of his time with his father. That's absolutely the best I'll do, and you'd better run back and make it quite clear to Dan. I bear him no ill will, and I'll be perfectly fair with him on the terms I've just mentioned."

Her brother's bitterness with her was not abated; but to effect his purpose he tried more reasonable persuasions, and when these were unavailing, raged again. All he did was useless; he could neither shake her nor exert the slightest influence upon Henry, though he continued the siege for three days over the four that he had promised. Then he returned, a defeated but fuming negotiator, to report his failures. His final instructions from his sister were to make it quite clear to Dan that she bore him no ill will and wished him well.

But when George reached the old house of the Oliphants, driving there directly from the train, he was told that he could not make her message clear to her husband; that he could not make anything clear to him.

Harlan took the dismayed traveller into the library. "The doctor says the trouble is there isn't anything to build up a resistance," Harlan said. "You see Dan's never taken any care of his health—'too busy,' of course—and he's exhausted his vitality. He caught a fearful cold going round in the rain hunting for that precious boy of his, and instead of staying in bed and nursing himself, he was hustling all over the place in a drizzle the next morning. He was all run down to start with, and his system couldn't afford it. At least, that's what they told us after the consultation yesterday afternoon."

"Consultation?" McMillan repeated blankly, though Harlan's manner had already prepared him for words worse than this.

Harlan sighed audibly, and shook his head. "Both lungs are congested, they told us early this morning. He can't——" He went to the bay window and looked down at the slightly frayed upholstery of the easy-chair it had once been his wont to occupy there. "Well, at your age and mine we've had experience of sickness enough to know that nobody can stand *that* long."

"Yes," McMillan groaned. "I suppose so."

"I think we won't tell him you've got back," Harlan said. "He's asked about it every now and then—wants to know if you've brought Henry yet. It'll be better to let him keep on expecting him than to tell him you've come back alone. I telegraphed you after the consultation, but by that time you'd already left New York, of course."

"Yes; it didn't reach me."

Then, for a time, neither of them found more to say. Harlan, near the window, stared out into the smoke haze that a cloudy day held down upon the city; McMillan sat frowning at the floor, and the room was vaguely noisy with a confusion of sounds from outdoors: hammerings and clatterings of steel where buildings were going up; the rending of timbers and crashes and shoutings where they were going down; the uproar of ponderous trucks grinding by upon the brick-paved cross street to the south, so that the strong old

house trembled with the subterranean communication of their vibrations—all to the incessantly rasped accompaniment of motor signals on the avenue.

"Isn't this a hell to be sick in?" Harlan asked, turning abruptly to McMillan. "We couldn't raise the windows to give him air without giving him this infernal smoke that makes him cough harder. And the noise—there's hardly a respite from it all night long! When the workmen go home the joy-riders and the taxis keep it up till daylight. He was too sick to be taken to a hospital or——" He interrupted himself with a desperate laugh. "We almost had to! Yesterday morning the servants called me, and I found the house full of men; they'd brought trucks right across the lawn, and started to work. They'd come to wreck the house—to tear it down. I told the foreman my brother was very sick, and he said in that case we'd better take him to a hospital; he had his orders from the contractor, and he was going ahead! Some of his men were already on the roof, making a horrible noise and tearing away the slate—throwing it down into the yard under Dan's window. I had hard work to get rid of them; and they left a great hole in the roof when they went. My heaven! when such things happen how's anybody ever to see any *meaning* in life?"

"I don't know!" George groaned. "I don't see much meaning in anything—not after what you've told me about Dan's condition."

"McMillan, I don't see a bit of meaning to the whole miserable business. Here's my brother spent all his days and nights—and all his strength and health—just blindly building up a bigger confusion and uproar that smashes him; and then when he *is* smashed, it keeps on bothering him and disturbing him—yes, and choking him!—on his very deathbed! I know your theory that it all means power, and that power may be thought beautiful—but it can't last, because nothing can last. So what the deuce is the good of it?"

And when the other, groaning again, said that he didn't know, Harlan groaned, too—then crossed the room to where

George sat in a crumpled attitude, touched him lightly on the shoulder, and turned away. "You're a good fellow, McMillan, and you haven't anything in the world to reproach yourself with. I don't think he's minded Lena's going away; he hasn't spoken of her at all, and I really believe he doesn't think of her. Your record with Dan is all right, but I've been realizing that mine isn't. I could have made success easier for him long ago; though I don't reproach myself so much with that, because he *did* get his success—for a while, and that's all anybody gets—and he enjoyed it all the more for having got it without help. What I'm thinking about this morning: I seem to have spent a great part of my life saying, 'What's the good of it?' as I did just now, and it's my brother's work I've been saying it about. I've always been 'superior'—and I'll never be different. I was born so, I believe, and didn't see it in time. The most I've ever actually *done* was to help organize a dilettante musical club! And Dan—well, I hope it's as you intimated the other night on Martha's porch—I hope Dan's been too busy to be much bothered about my 'judgments'! I've been just nothing; but even if he falls, he's at least been a branch of the growing tree, though we don't know where it's growing to, or why."

"No," McMillan said. "We don't know anything."

Harlan had begun to pace up and down the room. "I didn't understand that Dan was in real trouble financially," he said. "He'd been on the edge so often—I talked about it, but I'd got to thinking of it as a permanent thing for him to be on the edge. I didn't realize he might actually fall *off*—not until that little Jew friend of his came to me the other morning and *made* me realize it. Well, there's one thing I can be thankful for: I can be grateful that all I thought of, for once in my life, was that I was Dan's brother!"

"Harlan?" Martha Shelby's voice called him softly from the stairway.

"Yes?" He turned to the door, explaining, "Dan may want me—he sends for me to come in sometimes. Perhaps you might——" He paused.

"Yes," George said, rising. "I'll go and wire her. She might want to come. At any rate she'll send Henry. Then I'll come back here. I'll be downstairs in this room, if there's anything——"

"I'll let you know," Harlan said, and he went upstairs to Martha.

"Your mother's been with him," she whispered. "She and the nurse said he seemed to be trying to ask for somebody, but he was so weak, and his cough troubled him so much——"

"I'll go in and see," he said; but he came back to her a few moments later, and told her it was for her that Dan was asking.

She went into his room, sat by his bed, and put her hand gently over his on the coverlet. "Why, you're better, Dan," she said, as he turned his head and looked at her with eyes that cleared and grew brighter, for he recognized her.

"Think so?" He spoke distinctly though his voice was weak. "Well, maybe—maybe. I did hope——"

"Yes, Dan?"

"I did hope I wouldn't have to be sick very long. I've got so much to do. I've done a good deal of work, but I haven't ever *got* anywhere with it, much. There's a mighty big lot I'll have to begin over, Martha. You don't"—he paused, and laughed faintly. "You don't—you don't suppose God's used me and now He's goin' to throw me away, do you?"

"No, no, no!" she said, making her voice cheerful. "You've only got to go ahead with what you began long ago."

"No," he said reflectively. "No; it isn't exactly like that, Martha. Not exactly, that is. You see right now I'm a pretty complete failure—yes, I am. I'm a pretty bad failure."

"You? You're not!"

"Yes, I am," he returned feebly. "I better face it, Martha, or I'll never get anywhere. They've got Ornaby away from me——" His cough interrupted him; but he patiently let it have its way; and then, in a tone in which a wondering incredulity seemed to merge with resignation, he said, "Yes, sir; they did get Ornaby away from me!"

"But you'll get it back, Dan?"

"Think so? Well, maybe—maybe," he said indulgently. "But things do look like it came pretty close to a failure, Martha. It *would* have been one, too—it'd have been a bankruptcy, and I believe I just couldn't have stood that—but, well, anyhow it wasn't that bad, thanks to Harlan."

Martha's eyes widened. "Do you mean—do you mean Harlan helped you?"

"It was mighty good of him," Dan said. "My friends went to him and asked him if he would'nt let us have some money on a second mortgage on the new house. Harlan dug out all the securities he could sell for ready cash and he brought the money to me down at Sam Kohn's office. I must make it up to him some day. If it hadn't been for that I'd have gone clean under!" He laughed huskily. "Everybody 'd have known I was a failure for sure, if it hadn't been for that, Martha."

"But you're not!" she insisted. "You mustn't keep talking such nonsense, Dan."

"It isn't—it isn't exactly nonsense." The cough stopped him again; but he went on, while it still troubled him: "I'm a failure, Martha. I've been a failure in business—and a failure as a husband—and a failure as a father. George McMillan hasn't got here with Henry yet, has he?"

"No, dear; not yet."

Dan's hand moved restlessly under hers, and she released it. With a visible effort he rubbed his forehead, a gesture of perplexity that hurt her and made it difficult for her to retain her appearance of cheerfulness, because this characteristic gesture brought his boyhood so vividly to her memory. "I've just *got* to have Henry back," he said. "I've got to get him back so's to do right by him. It isn't—it isn't fair to a boy, Martha."

"What isn't?"

"Do you remember my grandmother Savage?"

"Of course. No one could forget her, Dan."

"No, I guess not. Well, she"—he shook his head, and half coughed, half laughed—"she was right about some things. My! but wouldn't she be sayin', 'Didn't I tell you so?' if she knew what's happened to my poor Henry! I've been a terrible failure with Henry, Martha." He looked patiently at her as she denied this; and then he said abruptly: "Why, I've even been a failure with *you*, Martha!"

"That's the absurdest thing you've said, dear!"

"No. I've been a failure as a friend, too. I let Lena fret me out of comin' in to see you when you'd been away that long stretch. I had no business to pay any attention to her. You see—why, *you* always really liked me better than she did, Martha!"

He spoke as if it were a discovery just made; and she assented to it, taking his hand again. "Yes, Dan. I've always liked you better than anybody."

"Have you?" he said inquiringly. "Well, I'm right glad to hear it. I'm right glad to hear it, Martha."

"Yes, dear. I always have."

He closed his eyes, but she felt a faint pressure upon her hand from his, and sat still for a time, looking at him with fond eyes that grew frightened as the pressure upon her fingers relaxed. She was not sure, for the moment, that he was still breathing; and she looked a terrified inquiry at the grave nurse who sat on the other side of the bed. The nurse shook her head, forming with her lips the word, "Sleeping"; but Dan opened his eyes again.

"It's curious," he said, "the way things are. A fellow goes along, and everything seems to run all right, year after year—he can hear a little kind of grindin' noise, maybe, sometimes, or something seems to slip, but he patches it up and doesn't let it scare him—he keeps goin' right along and everything seems to be workin' about as usual—and then one thing goes wrong—and then another—and then all of a sudden the whole works pile up on top of him, and he's down under the heap!" He took his hand again from Martha's,

and again passed it tremulously over his forehead in the old familiar gesture. "Well—maybe I could start in again if I can get over what ails me. I expect I need a good night's rest first, though. Maybe I can sleep now."

Martha went tiptoeing out, and through the hall to the room that had been Lena's. Harlan was there, sitting close beside his mother. "He wants to sleep," Martha told them, but had no sooner spoken than Dan's renewed coughing was heard—a sound that racked the sick man's mother. She shivered and gasped, and then, as the convulsion became fainter, went out trembling into the hall.

"Harlan," Martha said, "why didn't you tell me you tried to help Dan—at last?"

He rose, looking annoyed. "I didn't do anything that was in the slightest degree a sacrifice," he said. "I don't want you to misunderstand it. I never helped him when I thought it would be thrown away, and I didn't this time. He made over the new house to me, and I guess Lena'll sign the deed; she'll have to. In time it'll probably be worth all I gave for it. I wasn't going to see the name of Oliphant dragged through all the miserable notoriety of bankruptcy—and there was something besides."

"Yes?" she said. "What was that?"

"Well, a pack of old money-vultures were after him, and after all Dan's my brother."

"Yes, he is!" Martha said. She began to cry bitterly, but silently; then suddenly she put her arms about him. "He's still your brother, Harlan! We can say that yet;—he's just in that room down the hall there—he's not gone away—he's *still* your brother, Harlan!"

But even as Martha spoke, Mrs. Oliphant, looking through the door of the sick room, cried out in terror, then rushed to her son's bedside. Dan had unexpectedly lifted himself almost half upright; he seemed to struggle to rise; and in his eyes, wide-opened, but seeing neither his mother nor the nurse, there was a look of startled incredulity—the look of one who suddenly recognizes, to his utter astonishment, an

old acquaintance long since disappeared but now abruptly returned.

A moment later the uncontrolled sobbing of his mother let Harlan know that he no longer had a brother in the room down the hall.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE war halted the wrecking of National Avenue, but not for long. Until the soldiers came home and the country could begin to get back into its great stride again, groups of the old, thick-walled, big-roomed houses were permitted to survive; and although it was a survival doomed, and the dignity of the dignified old things had begun to appear somewhat ridiculous, since they were smeared with the smoke-fog and begirt with automobile warehouses and sales-buildings and noisy garages and repair shops, and every other kind of shop and office, yet here and there was the semblance—or, at least, the reminder—of a fine, ample, and mannerly old street that had once been the glory of its town.

But when the great heydays came, following the collapse of the war "expansion," and the country took up its dropped trades again, and renewed with furious and reckless energy its suppressed building, and, instead of getting back into its old great stride, set forth in a new stride gigantic beyond all its striding aforetime, then indeed the old avenue perished utterly, and nothing was left even to hint what it had been, or to tell its noble story. Old Hickory Shelby's house was the last to go;—the stone casing of his tall front doorway was the last of all the relics. Even when the rest of the house was flat, hauled away with the fountain swan and the cast-iron fence in dumping wagons and in the trucks of junk-dealers, the doorway was allowed to remain in place above the ruins of the veranda; and for several weeks stood forth against the setting sun like a fragment on the Roman Campagna. But in time it fell, too, as the Roman fragments will.

When it was gone the old hickory stick was gone, too. He had declined to the last to be an ornament of his daughter's fireside; and she never knew that she owed her husband's ownership of the "new house" to her father's insis-

tence on a "conservative policy" for the bank of which he was one of the directors. Old Hickory's thoughts were his own, as his ways were his own; and what he knew about himself he kept to himself, as he once or twice with a dry crackling informed his daughter.

The new house was a white house, and it remained almost white; for the smoke reached it but thinly, and in northern Ornaby, where there were other large white houses among the groves Dan Oliphant had preserved, the people struggled successfully to keep the curse under. Shrubberies lived there, not suffocated; it was a place where faces stayed clean, children throve, and lilacs bloomed in transparent air.

Martha drove downtown, late one afternoon of a cool day at the end of a green May, to bring her husband home from a directors' meeting at the bank; for Harlan, in her interest, had inherited his father-in-law's position; and, as they rolled homeward, checked now and then in the jam of traffic that filled the whole length of National Avenue, she spoke of the prevalence of "Sheridans," those excellently serviceable cars.

"Rather!" Harlan said. "All that old rascal had to do when he got control of the 'Ornaby Four' was to put back the old clutch and change the name. They're all over the country. Dan would have made a great fortune if he'd lived and could have held on."

"I don't think he'd mind missing the fortune much," she said. "I wish he could know how many people are riding in his cars, though. He'd like to know about that."

They passed a "gas-station," a flamboyantly painted bit of carnival, with an automobile warehouse and salesroom, and then an apartment house built around a begrimed courtyard, for its neighbours; and Harlan sighed. "It's hard to imagine you and I once lived where these things are, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, some of it's pretty ugly."

"It's all ugly. It's all hideous!" he said.

"No, not all." And when they had left the avenue behind

them, and reached the district of the bungalows and small wooden houses, she showed him gardens that he was forced to admit were "pretty." But when they got beyond this, to where had been the broad stretches of woodland and meadow that Dan had planned for his "restricted residence district," she insisted on her husband's consent to the word "beautiful"; for the woodland was still there, so that one could hardly see the houses; and long hedges of bridal-wreath were flowering everywhere, as if snow had fallen upon the shrubberies.

"Hasn't beauty come, Harlan?" she said.

"Oh, it's well enough here," he grumbled, as they swept into their own deep-shaded driveway.

Then they descended at white stone steps that led them up and out upon a terrace, and there they found the other member of their household sitting placidly—"to enjoy the bridal-wreath," she said.

"Isn't it rather chilly for you outdoors, mother?" Harlan asked; for she was now so fragile that she seemed almost transparent. "Don't you want to go in?"

"No, not just yet," she said. "I was just sitting here thinking how your father would have enjoyed all this. The town was pleasant when he and I were young, but of course it was never anything like this."

"No," Harlan said, with satire. "I should say it wasn't!"

"It's a great change," the old lady continued. "I don't suppose my mother could have believed how beautiful it would come to be."

"No," Harlan said, with a short laugh. "I don't believe she could!"

She overlooked his sarcasm, or was unaware of it, for she went on: "I don't suppose *I* could believe how wonderful everything will be when my grandson gets to be as old as you are, Harlan." But this thought made her wander from the subject. "I wish Lena would let him come home some day; I do want to see him;—I don't want to go till I've seen him again." Her voice became querulous, and then, with a

habit she had formed in her old age, she began to talk more to herself than to her son and daughter-in-law, but for the most part in indistinct whispers. Her subject was still Henry, who had done well in the war, had been twice "decorated," and now lived in Paris with his mother. The old lady murmured of him and of Lena for a little time; then fell into a reverie.

Harlan joined his wife at the terrace wall. "Well, you've got a supporter in mother. *She* seems to think it's beautiful." He pointed upward to where an opening through the foliage of tall beech trees left a vista of the sky; and there, against the evening blue, the thinning end of a plume of smoke, miles long, was visible. "Do you, really? Even that?" he asked.

"Dan must have thought so," she said. "I think he felt something in it that neither you nor I can understand."

"I think maybe he did," Harlan agreed. "Then why couldn't he at least have lived to see the fruition of what he planted, since he loved it and it was beautiful to him? Why should he be 'dead and forgotten'?"

"Listen!" Martha said.

There was in the air a murmur never quite stilled, even here; for it was made of multitude upon multitude of harsh mechanical sounds; but, being innumerable and distant, and blended into this one continuous murmur, they lost their harshness. In that murmur were the voices of dead Major Amberson, of dead Old Hickory, and of old Eugene Morgan, old Sheridan and his son, still alive and still swelling the murmur. But there was more than this: the murmur was the voice of old Bigness, old before Egypt, but shaping still toward the city he meant to make.

Martha, though, thought only of the best of the god's agents. She was still looking up at the smoke against the sky, so far above the long masses of flowering bridal-wreath that bordered the terrace where she and her husband stood. "Listen! Doesn't he live? That sound of the city down yonder—why, it's his very voice!"

THE END

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